

OERTH JOURNAL

Issue #34
Vol 3, no.7

BRAND
NEW
CONTENT
FOR THE
WORLD OF
GREYHAWK



Iggwilv looks for the
Vault of Daoud

A New Greyhawk Story
by **Tommy Kelly**

Saint Benedor

Ancient Opponent of the Death Knights
by **Gary Holian**

THE PENTAGRAM

a Spelljamming ship and her Crew
by **Denis Tetreault**

BLEREDD
FORCING A MAN

TWO ECOLOGIES: THRI-KREEN, AND PHOSTWOOD TREE

NPc - A CAPTAIN OF THE GREENJERKINS

Librarian's Chronicle

Welcome to another collection of a wide range of articles about the WORLD OF GREYHAWK!

Here we are, once again. We're a here a little later than we thought, but we still made it here!

This year's "Autumn" issue wasn't too much later than last year's ... November instead of October. But, we'd planned it for September at the beginning of the season, instead of 2/3 of the way through the season.

That seems to kind of be a recurring theme here in the *Librarian's Chronicle*, doesn't it? There always seems to be *something*. This time was no different ... Contracts, art, personal medical junk, life.

The biggest thing that surprised me, though, was the response from the fans as the weeks crept by. As is normal on the internet, there were a couple of notably edgy folks who were demanding or snarky when talking about where it was, but, overwhelmingly, there was a "how can I help?" sentiment whenever people would mention it or ask about it. There's been a lot of changes in the last two years with the magazine and it's incredible to note how many people download the magazine, in addition to how many people donate to support it. The idea that so many people responded to an acknowledgement of the need for volunteer staff was heartening, indeed. It looks like we'll have a more full team for next issue!

There's been a few issues in the past where we did "themes" Both years ago, and in recent memory. Last year, we did three issues themed independently one apiece as Folks, Feuds, and Factions. Then we did the "Infinite Oerths" issue. The more recent issues have been "unthemed". I've been enormously surprised at how often I get asked "What's the theme for this issue?" This is exciting for a couple of reasons. One is that it means fans are really interested in themed issues. Additionally, it means they're looking at writing for themed issues.

Many times, an author just wants to write something, and a little prompt like a theme will get the ball rolling for them. It's a great sign that they don't even know what they want to write ... they just know they want to write for the *Oerth Journal* and contribute to Creating and Sharing for the World of Greyhawk!

So, if any readers out there who take the time to read this letter from the editor have any really great ideas for a theme for which a wide range of articles could be written, or a theme many fans would enjoy, drop us a line at OJ@greyhawkonline.com and let us know what you think of!

So, "Create and Share, for the WORLD OF GREYHAWK"!

'Til the starbreak!

Kristoph Nolen
Editor-in-Chief



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REIMAGINING YRAG THE LORD

D&D



Lore and Background of one of the first GH characters

By Amy "Theala" Crittenden

Reimagining old characters and old stories is popular these days. From renewed interest in fairy tales through the television series *Once Upon a Time*, to updated movie versions of popular superhero characters such as Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, or the Ultimate series of famous comic stories from Marvel Comics ... fans often respond with excitement to new interpretations of popular stories and characters. We have a fascination with revisiting the origins of favorite characters, delving into their histories, and plumbing their depths to create new heights or new lows.

The *Greyhawk* setting has its own plethora of well-known characters, some of whom have gotten more exploration in officially published products than others. Some, such as the mage Mordenkainen, elicit fascination since his full stats were never published, and creator Gary Gygax refused to release them. Gygax's first player character, Yrag, has stats and background material officially released in the module WGR5 *Isle of the Ape*. The amount of detail is scant, just enough to give a sense of the character's abilities and personality, while leaving the rest up to the Dungeon Master (DM) to bring to life. Through the years, however, enough nuggets from Gygax's original games and play style can be gleaned from subsequent products, articles, and interviews to present a fuller picture, and create new opportunities for breathing new life and new possibilities into these staples of early D&D. This makes it possible for a more nuanced approach to Yrag, along with other classic Gygaxian characters, from the creator's personal games.

Canon History

There was a time when the name of Yrag the Lord was instantly recognizable among the people of the Free City of Greyhawk. Though often known today primarily as the adventuring companion of the famed wizard Mordenkainen, Yrag established for himself a fearless reputation for delving into the most dangerous dungeons, often to rescue his friends and associates, including

Mordenkainen, from their own folly¹. He explored the depths of Castle Greyhawk, ventured to the Isle of the Ape, and braved the depths of Castle Maure. But above all that he was beloved by Greyhawkers for bringing to justice a brutal murderer of children in the city. For that act, he was ennobled by the Directing Oligarchy and granted the dominion of Ford Keep.²

Yrag was born in the Free City of Greyhawk sometime around CY 386, as best as he knows. He is not actually sure what his true age is. He grew up a street urchin until one day he was met and taken in by Zagig Yragerne, eventually becoming his adopted son and taking a new name in his honor³.

Zagig did not make Yrag one of his many apprentices. Instead, Yrag trained with weapons and became a skilled swordsman. Details of his life as a young adult are scant. Zagig did not designate Yrag his heir when he retreated from public life, possibly because the adoption was not official. There is little information on his life until sometime around CY 551, when Yrag was recruited to join the Citadel of Eight. Mordenkainen, then a rising wizard, was determined to maintain the balance between good and evil: he saw this as essential to maintaining the health and existence of magic itself. Mordenkainen also recruited Yrag's good friend Riggby, a priest of Boccob, around the same time, seeing a well-rounded group of like minds with a variety of skills advantageous to his goals. Yrag was thought of as



Yrag along with his boon companions Mordenkainen, Bigby, and Riggby, as depicted in *Mordenkainen's Fantastic Adventure* (1984).

1—Gygax, G. (2003). Up on a Soapbox: The Devious DM. The other side of the screen. *Dragon*, May 2003, p. 16.

2—*Greyhawk: The Adventure Begins* (TAB), p. 115

3—TAB, p. 115; Tetreault, D. and Mona, E. (December, 2000). The Artisan's Quarter, *Living Greyhawk Journal*, 2, p. 8.

something of an assistant to Riggby, and known for his zealousness, even though he was much older than his friend⁴. Yrag and Riggby had a close working relationship with the Church of Boccob, where the ambitious priest was a rising star.

During the period between 560 and 570, Yrag met and adventured frequently with Mordenkainen, Bigby, the brothers Terik and Robilar, Riggby, Serten the Cleric, and Tenser. On several occasions, he came to rescue his compatriots after they overreached, as on one occasion when Mordenkainen and Bigby took on an iron golem in Castle Maure and Mordenkainen was turned to stone⁵. For a time he was accompanied by a henchman, the elven warrior Felnorith, though they parted company when Yrag and Mordenkainen had their falling out. In CY 565 Yrag and Robilar solved the Blood River Murders in Greyhawk, and brought the perpetrator, Sir Pluto Sans Pitie, to justice. For this, he and Robilar were both ennobled⁶.

The Battle of Emridy Meadows in CY 569 saw a change in Yrag's views towards Mordenkainen. Yrag became disillusioned with Mordenkainen's emphasis on "Balance" and deeply disturbed by Robilar's release of Iuz from the Godtrap in Castle Greyhawk. The final straw came when Mordenkainen gave their mutual friend Serten, a priest of St. Cuthbert, permission to participate in the Battle of Emridy Meadows. Yrag, like the other members of the Citadel of Eight, was away when the battle took place, and learned about Serten's death after the fact. He and Terik took the news particularly hard and both ended their relationships with Mordenkainen on the spot, leaving, it was said, for the Bandit Kingdoms⁷.

At some point during the Greyhawk Wars, Yrag returned to the city of Greyhawk. He re-established ties with members of the Directing Oligarchy, notably Nero Gasgal and Captain-General Tigran Gellner, commander of the city watch and Greyhawk's military. He secretly regained command of Ford Keep, a small fortification overseeing a critically strategic road-crossing and fording point on the Selintan River that leads to both Dyvers and Hardby, and unofficially oversaw its construction⁸.

Yrag is seldom to be found in Ford Keep or even in Greyhawk. Over one hundred years ago, well before he began adventuring with the Citadel of Eight, Yrag encountered a cabal of spellcasters and demons on a demi-plane (there has been speculation this cabal was the

Cult of the Ebon Flame, but this has not been proven) and destroyed it. Since then, the survivors of this cabal have been seeking retribution through his loved ones. Yrag has been forced to adopt a number of identities over the years to protect friends and relatives. Yrag

developed a romantic interest in Karin Koeffel, the owner and proprietor of Fruit of the Mill, an establishment in the Artisan's Quarter that sells locally made wine and other foodstuffs. Karin is not very discrete and enjoys telling stories about Yrag's (Yr as she knows him) accomplishments, most of which are written off as tall tales by those who hear them. Yrag has given Karin several magical items to protect her (including an *amulet of mind shielding*, and a *ring of protection +3*, among other items). Fruit of the Mill is "hands off" from thieves thanks to Yrag's friendship with Nero Gasgal⁹.

Modus operandi

Yrag is known to be a zealous assistant of his longtime patron, Riggby, Patriarch of Boccob in Verbobonc City. He is not and has never been a priest. However, he continues his long association with the Temple of Boccob, and is also known to worship his adoptive father Zagig. For reasons not entirely clear, he has delayed aging due to drinking multiple *potions of longevity*.

Yrag is cautious. He does not like to adventure with people he does not know or trust. He likes to watch others for a time before making a decision as to whether or not to adventure with them. However, he is a loyal friend, fearless in combat, and tenacious in his approach to solving problems, at times to the point where he nearly does himself in during the process. He has also been known to express destructive rage on occasion, often to

4—Mona, E. and Holian, G. (date). *Wheels within wheels: Greyhawk's Circle of Eight*. *Living Greyhawk Journal* vol 0, p. 5

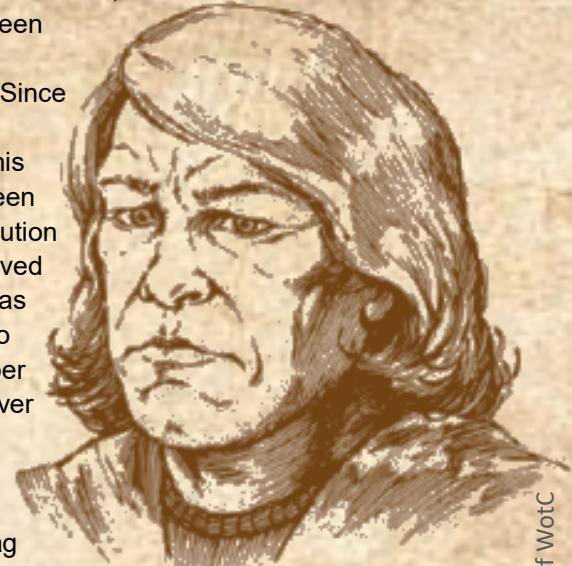
5—Gygax (2003, May), p. 16.; Gygax, Gary. *Swords and sorcery in wargaming*. *Dungeon*, 112 (July, 2004), p. 9.

6—TAB, p. 115; WGR 5 *Isle of the Ape*

7—Mona, E. and Holian, G. (date). *Wheels within wheels: Greyhawk's Circle of Eight*. *Living Greyhawk Journal* vol 0, p. 5

8—TAB, p. 115; *Living Greyhawk Mysterious Places: Ford Keep*, retrieved from <https://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=lg/lgmp/20070626a>

9—COR1-01 The Citadel-PCs RPGA *Living Greyhawk* module supplement, p. 10.



his own detriment, typically when his usual caution has failed him. In particular, he has a grudge against hydras, dead or alive. His caution led to overthinking a collection of hydra bones he found to the point he failed to acquire a magic item he had been seeking. He expresses that rage on any hydra he finds¹⁰.

In combat, Yrag uses a two-weapon fighting style, typically a longsword combined with a short sword. He relies on mobility and speed rather than raw strength in combat. He likes to have a backup plan when possible but, beyond that, does not often plan for his own future¹¹.

Yrag is well educated and well-traveled. While he is fascinated by magic and enjoys collecting magical items, this passion has led to difficulties. He has suffered many magical curses and ill effects from magic over the years. These issues may account for an assumption by some that he is of low intelligence¹².

Yrag has died at least twice. Once, in Castle Maure, rescuing Mordenkainen and Bigby, and a second time when he committed suicide under unknown circumstances. His companions resurrected him each time.

Appearance

Yrag stands 6'3" tall, and weighs approximately 215 pounds. He is often described as 'stout' though that is more of a description of his heavy muscular build and broad shoulders than being overweight. He is immensely strong and deceptively quick. He appears to be in his mid to late thirties but is actually about 220 years old. He has blond hair and blue eyes. The two portraits of him that exist depict him with shoulder length hair, clean shaven, with a stern, serious expression. He favors grey and green robes when not in his armor¹³.

What if? How exactly did Yrag meet Zagig? Perhaps the homeless boy tried to pick the Great Mage's pockets, being ignorant of whom he tried to steal from, and failed spectacularly. It might have amused Zagig to give such a daring lad a meal and, on learning more about him, a home.

It seems likely that Zagig would have at least tried to teach Yrag magic. It is equally likely that Yrag simply didn't have a talent for it. Zagig simply found a direction more fitting to Yrag's talents so that Yrag could support himself as an adult, hence his training at arms. He certainly would have seen to Yrag's education.

Exposure to magical experimentation may explain Yrag's caution. He likely grew up roaming the halls of Castle Greyhawk, perhaps even contributing ideas to its notorious traps. It is unclear whether he knew of or assisted Zagig in his apotheosis or preparing the Godtrap. Iuz was trapped in CY 505 when Yrag was about 130 years old. Iuz has no known enmity towards Yrag, suggesting the latter may not have been involved. It seems impossible to believe Yrag knew nothing about the inner layout and workings of Castle Greyhawk before Zagig's apotheosis; he grew up during the period when Zagig was designing and constructing the castle.

His time between Zagig's apotheosis and joining the Citadel of Eight is equally a mystery. He did meet Riggby at some point before CY 550. Was he really the servant and mentored, or was there another aspect to their friendship? Yrag is described as a zealot; why? What motivates his point of view? It is plausible that Yrag spent considerable time working for the Church in one capacity or another. He may not be able to cast spells, but magic is important to him, and he strives to protect it and nurture it. This explains why some view him as a "zealot," and it would explain his initial interest in joining Mordenkainen's Citadel of Eight.

Another aspect of his early life is the question of whether he ever married and fathered children. It is quite possible he did. Clearly Yrag is open to romantic relationships. It is likely he married and had children at some point when his movements were not known, or fathered illegitimate children (some of whom he may not know about). The cult pursuing him is stated to have targeted his friends and family; for that to be true, he must have family for them to target.

Since Yrag is dodging a very dangerous cult, he often changes his name. It is reasonable to think he changes his appearance from time to time in simple ways. For example, the official images show him with shoulder length hair, clean-shaven, with a stern look. Today, he might wear his hair shortly cropped, sport a beard, and display a much more easygoing personality. He is Zagig's adopted son; one would think he has a sense of humor (though Zagig may have strained it at some point). He often uses anagrams of his name when choosing a new one. Indeed, his image of the stern zealot may be misdirection on his part, to make it easier for him to move about undetected by his enemies.

¹⁰—Gygax, G. *Up on a Soapbox: Remember the Mission!* *Dragon Magazine*, 304(February, 2003), p. 14; Gygax, G. *Up on a Soapbox: Dungeon Hospitality*. *Dragon Magazine*, 292 (February, 2002), p. 24; Gygax, G. *ENWorld Q&A with Gary Gygax, Part VIII*

¹¹—Wiese, Robert. COR1-00 The Citadel-PCs RPGA *Living Greyhawk* module, p.

¹²—Gygax, G. *Up on a Soapbox: Dungeon Hospitality*. *Dragon Magazine*, 292 (February, 2002), p. 24; TAB, p. 115.

¹³—TAB, p. 115; WGR 5 *Isle of the Ape*, p. 31; COR1-01 The Citadel-PCs RPGA *Living Greyhawk* module supplement, p. 10.

Yrag is a complex man who cultivates stereotypes about himself in order to confuse his enemies and hide in plain sight. Where others see him as a religious zealot, he may have enough of a sense of humor and whimsy to let people believe he is a zealot, dour, or of low intelligence simply so that if an enemy met him, he'd be unrecognizable to them.

Yrag's write-up states he possesses "many magic items".¹⁴ Gary Gygax also mentions him recovering items he then sold at great profit. His mention in *Maure Castle* suggests he routinely came away with great wealth from dungeon delving.¹⁵ It is probable he retains at least some of that wealth. His cautious nature makes it unlikely he lost it through the years. It is likely scattered in a variety of banks or hidey-holes, and may not always be quickly accessible. Certainly, he retained enough to provide Karin Koeffel with significant magical protection. This enables the GM to be creative in equipping Yrag with magical items appropriate to the adventure being undertaken, since his cautious nature would move him to investigate and

evaluate the risks of the undertaking and come equipped to meet them.



YRAG

Yrag the Lord, Yrag Yragerme, Yrag of Ford Keep, "Yr", and other aliases not revealed

Fighter 18 (Champion)

CLASS & LEVEL

Human

RACE

STR **+5** PROFICIENCY BONUS
20

DEX **+3** SAVING THROWS
16
+11 Strength Saves
+9 Dexterity Saves
+10 Constitution Saves
-1 Intelligence Saves
+2 Wisdom Saves
+1 Charisma Saves
+ Prof. bonus added

CON **+4** SKILLS
18
+6 Acrobatics (Dex)
+8 Animal Handling (Wis)
-1 Arcana (Int)
+8 Athletics (Str)
+1 Deception (Cha)
-1 History (Int)
+2 Insight (Wis)
+7 Intimidation (Cha)
-1 Investigation (Int)
+2 Medicine (Wis)
-1 Nature (Int)
+8 Perception (Wis)
+1 Performance (Cha)
+1 Persuasion (Cha)
-1 Religion (Int)
+6 Sleight of Hand (Dex)
+6 Stealth (Dex) (Disadv.)
+8 Survival (Wis)
+ Prof. bonus added

18 PASSIVE WISDOM (PERCEPTION)

PROFICIENCIES & LANGUAGES

Armor: light armor, medium armor, heavy armor, shields

Weapons: simple weapons, martial weapons

Tools: one set of artisan's tools, vehicles (land)

Saving Throws: Strength, Constitution Skills: Animal Handling, Intimidation, Perception, Survival

Languages: Common, Elvish, Suel, Flan, Deridian, Dwur, Euroz, Draconic, Rhopan

280,900

EXPERIENCE POINTS

Folk Hero

BACKGROUND

ARMOR CLASS [AC] **18** INITIATIVE **+3** SPEED **30 ft.**

Armor Worn: Chain mail and shield

HIT POINTS **184** HIT DICE **18d10**

DEATH SAVES: Success 0 0 0 Fail 0 0 0

WEAPON & UNARMED ATTACKS

Extra Attack. When making an Attack action, you may make three attacks rather than one.

Longsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +11 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 1d8+5 slashing damage. If used two-handed in melee, does 1d10+5 damage.

Javelin. Melee Weapon Attack: +11 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 1d6+5 piercing damage. If thrown, normal range to 30 ft.; disadvantage long range 31 to 120 ft.

MAGIC & SPECIAL ATTACKS

Fighting Style: Duelling. Add 2 damage to each melee weapon attack if no other weapon in other hand.

Fighting Style: Great Weapon Fighting. Roll 1 or 2 on damage dice with two-handed melee weapons.

EQUIPMENT & TREASURE

Carried Gear: Plate mail +2 armor [AC 16], shield [AC +2], longsword +1 flame tongue, javelin, belt pouch, set of common clothes, iron pot, shovel

Magical Items: Ring of Invisibility, Potion of Storm Giant Strength, Scroll of Protection from Elementals [All], Ring of Contraries

Other items as assigned by the DM

Lifting and Carrying: 300 lbs. max. carrying capacity; 600 lbs. pushing or dragging [speed -5 ft.]; 600 lbs. max. lift.

Coins & Gems: 35,010 gold pieces [gp]; 28 silver pieces [sp]; 30 copper pieces [cp]; 2 gems [worth 50 gp each] This is not likely the extent of Yrag's true wealth, but rather a reflection of what resources he may have readily available at any given time.

E. Gary Gygax

Creator

Updated by Amy Crittenden

FEATURES, TRAITS & MORE

Alignment: Neutral. I will help others, but avoid serious personal risks or loyalties that don't benefit me.

Human Traits (PHB p. 29)

- Age: 220 years (adults 35)
- Medium Size [5' 3", 215 lbs.]

Fighter Class Features (PHB p. 70)

- Fighting Style [Duelling]
- Second Wind [regain 1d10+10 h.p.]
- Action Surge [extra action in turn once between short rests]
- Superior Critical [crit on 18, 19 or 20]
- Extra Attack [3/attack]
- Remarkable Athlete [boost jumping and non-prof. Str, Dex, Con skills]
- Indomitable [rerolls save 3 times between long rests]
- Second Fighting Style [Great Weapon Fighting]
- Survivor [heal 9 h.p. each turn if between 0 to half hit points]

Folk Hero Features (PHB p. 131)

- Rustic Hospitality

14—WGR 5, *Isle of the Ape*, p. 31; TAB p. 115

15—Dragon 292, p. 24; Kuntz, Robert and Gygax, Gary. *Maure Castle*. *Dungeon* 112, (July, 2004), p. 42.

A FISTFUL OF BAUBLES



Seeking Skrellingshald

By David Leonard, of [Greyhawk Musings](#)

Deafened by the roar which chased him through the cavernous arch, Hradji managed to take a few final steps before collapsing to the tiled floor of a vast domed chamber amid a cacophony of coloured glass. The ground shook as though struck by Jascar's Hammer, far in excess of the clatter his axe made as it rang upon the shards of glass and the mosaic beneath it. A fog of ice crystals sparkled the arctic air around him. His heavy breath added to it, its issue devoid of heat even as it blew from him.

Got to keep moving, he thought while dragging his numb self further into the vault, scraping and grinding the shards of glass under him. It took immense effort, but his legs slowly found pliable strength as sensation returned. Cold sweat beaded on his skin; winter's sting piercing his nose and his fingers.

That hideous crone, that witch!, he seethed, recalling her wry smile and cackling laugh. She must have known it was here! But she had not said a thing.

"Why have ye disturbed my rest, Beartooth?"

She might have been beautiful once, but that was the secret of ages past. What remained had soured. Her tarnished skin brindled. Her breath reeked of decades past. Her eyes had dimmed to pale reflections of a soul which had seen too many futures and died the death of all those she had foreseen. A halo of brittle hair caught and captured what little light she allowed within the close, earthen den in which she nested, more of a tangle of branches and twigs than an actual dwelling.

Her small fire cackled as though laughing at his discomfort, its grim smoke melting the snow from his cloak.

Hradji scowled. *She had the nerve to speak to him like that. As though he were some beggar! He had half a mind to...! But, no. He must not. He swallowed his pride.*

"You know why I'm here, old woman," he said.

"Speak the words, if I am to see."

"We need weapons of power if we are to defeat our enemies."

The crone was not satisfied: "What enemies?"

The Stonefists, he thought. Orcs, he thought. What did it matter?, he fumed. The old woman knew as well as he the enemies they faced. But that was not what he said. He whispered, exhaled, "luz," for in his heart, he knew where the hitherto unspoken terror lay.

She threw a handful of dust onto the crackling fire. It flashed and flared, masking the foul reek of her body and breath. Her eyes rolled into her lids, becoming the orbs of the corpse she resembled. "What shall ye risk?" she whispered.

Even as Hradji uttered the word, "Anything," she cackled: "Be careful what ye dare," she said, "for fate is fickle."

Damned witch! he thought. Speak plain!

Never suffer the witch to live, his father had always said. But his father has suffered the crone at the edge of

the village, much as he had. The women had demanded such. Midwife, they said. Healer. The speaker of truths, they said. Damned magic! What possessed women to believe such nonsense! Nevertheless, here he was, seeking her sight.

He shivered, despite the heat in the tiny hovel.

"Get on with it, crone," he growled.

"Give me thy hand," she rasped. She took it and cut it. Held it over the flame, the stream of his lifeblood pattering it, sizzling and smoking. She threw another handful of her dust atop it; it flared, it smoked.

"Breathe deep," she commanded.

His head swam, his vision swirled. He steeled himself. *Damned magic, he thought again. Trust in steel, and in courage.*

His vision had been nothing like this.

He had seen a vision of valleys and tall buildings crawling up and into cliffs. Of ivy and courtyards and coloured glass and water cascading from the most splendid of statuary. In the center of all that, a shining dome of gold. *Skrellingshald, she had whispered. Fabled Skrellingshald.*

Hradji asked the skalds what they knew of Skrellingshald. They knew little, save it was ancient, mysterious, and a land of eternal summer. The Sisters of Mystery knew even less, only that some power had razed it to the ground when the Ur-Flan reigned. Hradji sailed to Ratik to consult the sages in Marner, for he was not as ignorant as those who dismissed knowledge from dusty tomes out of hand. He knew those books held lore and secrets long forgotten, or untainted by so many tellings. Their tomes had not forgotten Skrellingshald, but they named it Tostenhca, and placed it somewhere in the Griff Mountains, high above Tenh. High in the Griffs, where few ventured, and from where fewer returned.

Was Skrellingshald worth the risk, he wondered? Be careful what ye dare, the crone said, for fate is fickle. He brushed her vague warnings off as theatrics meant to mystify and mire the overly-cautious in their fear.

He mustered his team: A Sister of Mystery to bring good fortune, a skald to tell the tale, trackers, and men who knew the sharp end of both arrow and axe. Those he trusted, kinsmen and clansmen. But Ratik had pressed two upon him, an elf and a mage. He had refused. It is for the best, they said. He grumbled. He argued. But Ratik had pled a worthy case. *The elves know the old and hidden ways, they said. And, how can you know the nature of what you find without a mage? Besides, they said, the two we have in mind were seasoned against the orcs and gnolls which infested the caves north of Riverport. Reluctantly, he agreed and set forth.*

Snow howled and rolled about him, and had since base camp, cloaking the sheer heights to either side. It invaded his eyes, caught in his throat. Everything smelled of snow. It was nothing he was not used to, what all Rhizians

weathered each and every winter. Such weather warmed the Fruztii's heart. However, such weather did not make for good tracking, or discovering hidden dangers, or finding their way for that matter; it did mask their approach and deaden any sound which might betray their presence. Fridmund's song surely would have, had the snow not held it close. Hradji had thought to hush him, but Fridmund's soft baritone comforted them and passed the time, so Hradji had let him sing his songs of warm valleys and lost cities.

Stones dribbled and skipped from the port slope, cutting Fridmund's stanza short. All eyes darted from height to height, from outcrops to the veils of sparse pines. Tittering cut the silence, a chattering not unlike that of squirrels - which were all too silent just then.

The first arrows rained down, their whir buzzing through the silence. Tall, burly Gunnar staggered, his wind-driven from him. Even as he pulled the first arrow from his furs, another, and another spun him.

Angnar rushed back from far point, his shield plumed with fletching. The nimble youth ducked and skid upon reaching where Gunnar had been driven to his knee, snow billowing up around them. Angnar gripped Gunnar by the collar as the other tore yet more arrows from his hide and fur, and dragged him to the safety of the nearest snow-capped outcrop, Death chasing them.

Runolf made to join his brother but the barrage of tiny arrows changed his mind. Should he have continued, Angnar would be a twin no more. His headlong run stalled. He slipped and fell, barely catching himself before he was laid full out. The arrows raced him to the sparse treeline, their sharp stone tips finding his furs, his cloak, and the trees before he found safety.

The tittering became full-blown laughter. Shadows darted between the pines in the middle distance. Short shadows.

Kobolds, Hradji raged. Blasted vermin! He darted from tree to tree, and spied the wool-clad young mage peering over the snow-dressed rock that shielded him from the worst of the barrage. Stupid kid, Hradji thought. Stupid, stupid kid! The mage was supposed to be an adventurer, seasoned beyond his years! That was what they said! "Cinniúint," he bellowed! "Get down!" That was all he needed, for their diviner to meet his end before they truly had use of him. Hradji ignored his own command and bolted across what space remained, landing heavily and pulling the mage to the ground.

"What are you trying to do," Hradji panted, "get shot in the eye?"

"I'm counting," the youth said, shrugging the big man off, poking his head up again. He gestured as an arrow almost did what Hradji warned him one might do, and it ricocheted off a shimmer of air.

Ylva too ignored Hradji's command, weaving across the clearing amid a torrent of arrows and stones and collapsed next to the young mage. Didn't anyone have any common sense, Hradji wondered? She would have,

Hradji thought, had she not been sneaking into the mage's tent since before they climbed into the lofty range. What was she thinking, dallying with a southerner? More arrows skittered and snapped against their rock.

"I think they're leaving," she said, risking a look over the rock.

The tittering laughter receded, taunting them.

The elf darted silently past Hradji's hide, his mottled shadow resolving from the trees as though he had been birthed from them. "Go easy, Scáthú," Cinniúint said as the elf passed, then rising and inspecting the fletching of the arrows sprouting from the snows. "I counted two score of them, but I'd guess twice that, judging by how many arrows flew." Scáthú nodded and stalked along an animal track that only his keen eyes had seen.

The others rose from their hiding places in the face of the courage of the tattooed Flan and the elf of the wood. First Hradji, then fleet-footed Runolf; then his brother Angnar, plucking yet more of the little arrows from Gunnar's furs and hides.

"Good thing you're so fat," Angnar said, dusting off the decidedly unfat Gunnar as he rose to his knees then his feet. He swept his eyes across the trees and ridgeline for those kobolds which must surely be waiting for them to reveal themselves.

"What are you waiting for," Hradji yelled at the brothers, "are you to be shamed by a finger wiggler and an elf no bigger than a bairn?"

Angnar and Runolf shared a glance and steeled themselves. They would not be outdone by the southerners. They had been raiding for six seasons, already bearded and bloodied. They had crossed swords with the Asperdians and the Duxchaners, and had faced the Fists and lived to fight another day. Their bows strung, they loped ahead of the rest, each advancing in turn, wary as they had not been when listening to Fridmund's song. Tracks emerged from the drifting snow, few at first, then more, far more.

The others followed at what they assumed was a safe distance, watching over those two who led, and the heights that surrounded them.

A rustle of birds took flight, and Ylva called upon the blessing of Wee Jas, pleading, "Should you desire such, grant your permission that those seeking your boon should walk this Oerth long enough to complete their quest," and as her words ebbed, the flames that writhed about the etched skull of her pendant twisted and blazed. Its flare lightened the load of worry that furrowed the brows of those around her, except Hradji's. His anger burned hotter than any god's bauble might. It seethed, bent on release, eager to crush the wee dragon-things' skulls.

They gathered in a circle about the young mage as a flurry of tiny arrows and sharpened sticks rose and fell, and Gunnar and Ylva raised their shields to their flight. A phalanx of the dragon dogs burst from either side of the twins. A pinch of sand spilled from Cinniúint's fingers as



he uttered a string of harsh syllables that seemed more consonant than vowel and all but two crashed headlong to the frozen ground in slumber. Those two scattered as the twins made fast work of those scattered about them.

The rain of sticks increased then, and a howl of rage rose to Hradji's right. He spun to face the largest kobold he had ever seen shaking its spear high above its head. It might have been as tall as a dwarf, a titan of its kind. It brayed with what must have been a rage that matched Hradji's.

Hradji's boiled over at the cocky kobold's nerve. It was just a kobold, regardless of size. He broke from their circle, sprinting across the drifting snow as though it were but inches deep, scaling the rise amid the trees toward the bold little vermin.

It turned and ran, its snout turning back repeatedly as it lost ground to Hradji's pursuit. Hradji could taste its blood, he could feel its scrawny neck snap in his grip. He inched closer, and closer still, until it was within his reach. It darted left, then round this tree, under that bough, then burst out upon a narrow clearing. He swung his axe out and round and round again, its blade intent on the kobold's spine.

The little beastie's lips cracked open. And it smiled.

The snowy ground gave way beneath Hradji's feet. It cracked. And fell away, snapping inward and down, the snow that had covered the blind spilling in around him. His stomach leapt into his throat. He caught a glimpse of sharpened sticks at the bottom. Smelled the wretched foul odor wafting up from its exposed depth. His axe flew wide as he groped for the edge of the pit. His chest hit the lip hard, hammering his wind from him. His fingers clawed and tore at the ground. To no avail. He could gain no purchase. He was sliding backwards, back towards his death. He could not believe it. He was to die in the clutch of a vermin's trap. He braced himself for the inevitable fall and inevitable impalement upon the spikes. His foot found a toehold, and he slid no further.

He eyed that damnable kobold as it turned back and approached him. It seemed amused by his fruitless attempt to save himself. It crouched, grinned menacingly, and made one more mocking titter. The beast licked its lips with a rising bloodlust and stood. The creature's leer broadened with anticipation as it waited. It bristled at the edge of lashing forward, seemingly ready to burst into motion. Hradji's eyes locked with the beast and an eternity passed in a moment.

What are you waiting for, he wondered? Finish it!

Suddenly, its eyes snapped up. It sniffed the air and tasted it. Suddenly it yelped, bolting into the tangle of branches behind it, the boughs dancing and shaking off their burden of snow.

Hradji tried to see what had spooked the kobold, but as he turned his head to look, he slid further back, and it took all his strength not to tumble fully backwards.

A delicate hand took hold Hradji's furs and hauled on

them with a strength the northerner would never have expected from so small a frame. With the elf's help, Hradji was soon out of the pit. He found his feet, his axe, and bent to look for the kobold's trail.

"Don't bother," Scáthú said, his voice light and gentle. "He's long gone. And there'll be more traps. And kobolds. The woods are littered with them. We best return." With that, the elf turned and made his way back down the path.

"Where were you?" Hradji asked, unable to keep the anger from his voice. He could hear Gunnar cursing as he crashed towards them.

"Killing kobolds," Scáthú said without bothering to turn and face him. "Where do you think I was?"

Gunnar spilled out from the trees; his sword as red as his face.

"You alright?" Gunnar asked.

Ylva was right behind him. She slowed, taking in what lay around her. The pit. The spikes. Then Hradji.

"I'm fine," Hradji said, too gruffly. "The others?"

"None too worse for wear," she said.

What remained of the kobold assault lay scattered about. The little beasts had been brave, if foolhardy, Hadji noted, and they had paid the price for it. The kobolds had lost fewer than he would have expected. He stood a moment considering the sheer number of arrows and javelins sprouting from the ground, like so many saplings surprised to find their roots aswirl with sudden snow.

"Where'd the rest of the little rats disappear to?"

The twins motioned north. "For the most part," Angnar said. Runolf nodded agreement.

"After them, then," he commanded. He shouldered his axe and made to depart.

Cinniúint and Scáthú exchanged a glance, conferring silently.

Hradji glared at the southerners. "You have something to say?"

"We should be cautious," Cinniúint said.

Kord's sakes! "Cautious? We have them on the run. Time to finish them off before they can regroup."

"No," Scáthú said, either heedless of Hradji's rising temper or unmoved by it. Judging by what little he knew of the elf, Hraji suspected the latter. "It's what the kobold's want you to do."

"We need to be cautious," Cinniúint repeated. "We're close to Tostencha."

"Bullshit. How can you know that?"

"Because I've dreamed what may be," Cinniúint said, "and in my dream I saw fur-cloaked kobolds among the spires and domes."

Hradji snorted. "Dreams," he said, "what of them? They mean nothing."

Ylva stepped between them. "You yourself have had visions," she said, her eyes fixed on Hradji. "So, you - above all - should know not to belittle things you don't understand."

Hradji remained unconvinced.

"If you don't want to believe my dream," Cinniúint said, "that's well and good; but believe this, kobolds are notorious for luring the unwary to their doom. I've seen more than a few 'brave' men rush to their end, and I've no intention of joining them. What's more, kobolds don't usually venture far from their lairs, and their dens are always well protected."

Hradji wavered. He looked to his kin, and a vision of them laid out, thick with arrows, their lifeblood freezing into

the snow, haunted him.

He exhaled, venting what remained of his rage. He nodded.

"Send your most able scout forward," Cinniúint began. "Scáthú will shadow him...."

The next hour was indeed cautious. The party crept forward from tree to hollow, from rockface to outcrop. They made a measured advance, their eyes intent on sussing out what might be hidden behind the layered snow. Their ears were straining to discern the difference between what might be a sentry's call from the caw of a crow, the chittering of a squirrel, or the groan of the surrounding trees. Nothing revealed itself. Nothing that prickled Hradji's nape, anyway. The woods smelled as they should, of pine and snow.

These mountains were all too close for Hradji's liking. He yearned for the sea, where the horizon was plain and clear. Where one's enemies were plain to see, flying their colours, and standing out upon their rails and bulwarks. Only the depths were hidden. Black, too deep to plumb, mysterious. Like these tangles and cliffs. What might dwell in such a place, he wondered? He shivered, his mind filled with harpies and hags and giants and dragons. He shook his head, and ground his teeth. Those were the terrors of childhood, best left behind at the first hint of whiskers.

Hradji sensed a disturbance ahead. He gripped his battleaxe, and drew a smaller ax to hurl.

Runolf resolved from the woods ahead, his features both anxious and excited. He closed with Hradji and crouched facing him.

"The wizard was right," he said, his voice quiet and close. He pointed with his chin. "There's a ruin just beyond this stand of trees."

Hradji's heartbeat quickened.

"But he was right about the kobolds, too. If you wait at the treeline and look hard, you can see them keeping to the shadows, up on the rooftops, too."

"Lead on," Hradji said to Runolf. He turned to those



following. Placed a finger to his lips, and pointed to his eyes, then the trees and heights around him.

He crept forward and gazed upon a wonder he had doubted he would ever behold.

A broad boulevard curved through the valley, its length bounded by what must have been opulence before the stonework had begun to collapse in on itself. To either side stood two-, three-, and four-story buildings, each fronted by an overgrown garden of denuded branches and pines, each guarded by broken walls and what were likely arched gates, before they too became tumbles of jagged blocks laying in ruins. They were watched over by statuary whose features had long since lost their refinement. Peaked doorways, as well as round and quarter-round holes, stared darkly from the now pitted fronts. Balconies thrust out from them, some still true, most defying the inevitability of their joining the detritus beneath them. More of these palaces rose up behind those first, and more still behind them, until the final row must surely perch upon the cliff face, if not burrow into it.

The most glorious sight to behold was the dome towering at the centre of this once great city and the spire thrusting toward the heavens from the dome's height. It glistened and glowed, despite the halo of snow which had settled upon it and obscured it. It loomed over all surrounding it.

Skrellingshald, Hradji breathed. Surely this must be Skrellingshald.



EXPLORING THE DRY STEPPES

Excerpt from the Journal of Zabin Al-Xin

By John Burchfield of [BlueBox RPG](#)

When I began the journey to explore the flora and fauna that now exist where my Baklunish ancestors once thrived, I could never have imagined what would befall me in the ragged and desolate lands that border the Sea of Dust. What I saw, what I learned while exploring the Dry Steppes, has forever changed me, even if my forever is but the next hour, and I pray it will similarly influence anyone that recovers this journal.

For three days, I had tracked the prints of a Steppe Hunter, a giant arachnid only found in the desolate Steppes. Prints in the dusty soil hinted at a creature spanning more than five feet, monstrous for its kind. This spider, if even it may be called such (seems a bit akin to calling a dragon a lizard), has been a subject of fascination for me since I first saw the body of a Rhenee bitten by one. It wasn't the bloated black face that captured my interest, but rather the punctures in the torso that gaped as large as dagger wounds. Marvelous.

My hunt was at once exhilarating and terrifying, so I

journalized and recorded every step of my research. I found the beast eventually, though not as I had hoped. As I sit here now before a meagre campfire with an unexpected quarry, I have good reason to wonder if these words will ever be read.



Illustration by John Dollar

courtesy WotC

I scuttled forward on hands and knees across the sharp rocks until I could crane my neck far enough to see over the ridge. A rhythmic clicking echoed just ahead, as though beckoning me to some strange dance here on the desolate edges of civilized kingdoms. I cursed as the teeth of the ridge pressed into my ribs; by



Illustration by FrederikaDraws

the hells, this place has innumerable ways to inflict pain on an innocent traveler.

Puzzled, I paused to listen further to the staccato click over the ridge. I had seen no research or read of any account of such a sound being associated with the Steppe Hunter. Glancing back over my shoulder, I was overwhelmed with a sense of loss. It seems impossible to imagine the scorched scrubland around me had once been the height of civilization, dotted with magnificent cities teeming with my ancestors. Not even the bones of those cities were hinted at anywhere. The broken ground was now covered with plants that twisted at odd angles which were, almost without exception, bristling with thorns sufficient to impale a small animal. Or to severely punish the unwary traveler.

I pulled my attention back to the sound and peered over the ridge to find the instrument that produced it.

It took several moments for me to comprehend what I saw. I had indeed found my spider, but it looked distinctly less threatening as it dangled limply from the end of an odd-looking spear. What carried the spear was of greater concern, and even my scientific curiosity fled and curled up beneath the blanket of fear in my mind. The words of this humble scholar cannot convey what a man feels when he knows he stares at his own death. Bowels to water and all that, certainly. But there is something more; a stillness, as though by not moving, not breathing, not thinking, you can prolong your final moments on Oerth. The clicking had stopped.

Giant green compound eyes held the most malevolent black dots that seemed to stare through my skull and root around in my mind. Psuedopupils, my scientific training proffered while still quivering beneath the metaphorical blanket. The creature stood taller than any man I'd seen, perhaps seven feet; its smooth crimson carapace shifted colors in the morning sunlight; sanguine shadows were deep carmine and highlights were carnelian and maroon. It held a two-forked spear with my Steppe Hunter dangling from one prong.

It was a J'hol, a humanoid mantis. And I? I was almost certainly dead.

A desperate thought, "maybe it hasn't seen me yet", flashed through my mind. It was perhaps less a thought than an irrational prayer. Trying not to feel like a beetle crawling beneath a rock, I began to slowly inch back down below the ridge. That's when I received my third bit of instruction on the J'hol (the first two being a penchant for Steppe Hunter meat and the ability to produce an immediate urge to urinate in others). The creature shimmered and then simply vanished.

Understand, I am no mean student in the arcane arts; I know an illusory enchantment when I see one, and that was most certainly not what I had witnessed. There were no words or incantations uttered, no tell-tale somatic flashing of fingers. The J'hol simply became one with the

broken ground and twisted foliage surrounding us.

Now that I was flat on my belly again, my mind skittered in fear. I forced my trembling curiosity to rouse and contemplate what I had just seen, dimly recalling an old text that had mentioned a Bakluni explorer giving witness to the use of psionics among the J'hol. Texts of this nature are understandably rare, as one close enough to observe such phenomena is also close enough to be eaten. What a thing to see first-hand! Exhilaration tried to rise and alloy with my terror but failed miserably.

The only warning I received was a faint scrabbling of rocks behind me before I was gripped and hoisted smoothly into the air. "Such strength", muttered whichever corner of my mind was responsible for daft observations in the face of death. I will note with no small degree of pride that I yet possessed the strength of intellect not to foolishly lash



out with my
meagre weapon,
and also the
vitality of
constitution
not to soil
myself.

Staring into
those
insectile eyes
at arm's length,
I no longer had
any question this
creature could read
my thoughts. A
palpable
sentience pushed
at the front of my skull
and began to...
rummage. I proclaim this
with certainty to be
the most
disorienting
experience of my
life. It conveyed at once a sense
of vertigo and a revulsion at
the violation of my mind.

"Please, do not eat me," I managed. "I'm but a humble

scholar and have a rather wretched skin infection which no doubt renders me unpalatable." Admittedly, not my most adroit line of reasoning, but acceptable given the circumstance. The J'hol let out a single percussive click from its formidable mandibles and unceremoniously bundled me under one arm like a misbehaved child, then provided my fourth lesson. With a brief gather, it bound aloft to what could not have been less than twenty feet into the air. I swear it! As we soared across the ridge, I may have screamed a bit, though it's impossible to be certain since I lapsed into unconsciousness.

When I awakened, the sun squatted low on the horizon, already partially hidden by jagged mountains, and the hint of a chill desert evening was in the air. After a moment of collecting my wits, I tried to sit up and found it difficult as my hands were bound behind my back. Levering up with an elbow, I could see my feet were also bound with something that was like no rope I had ever seen. As I studied the binding, it looked like nothing so much as a piece of ligament from some monstrous creature.

Academic interests aside, I was tightly trussed.

Twisting to look around in the rich crimson light of the Dry Steppes sunset, I saw the creature standing a few feet away with what I could only assume was J'hol

nonchalance. Some recess of my mind noted with guarded relief that the Steppe Hunter was half-eaten and laying in a grotesque pile of hairy legs at his feet. Perhaps the creature was sated. His spear leaned against a rock a few feet away, and a small leather sack sat close by. This brought to mind my own sack, which sat uselessly atop my horse some several miles back where my ill-fated chase of that damnable spider had begun.

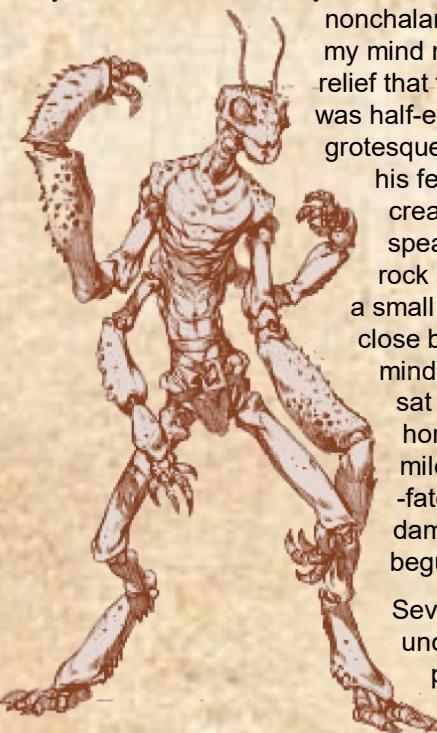
Several moments of uncomfortable silence passed as the mantid stared at me with those passionless

eyes. In that awkward span, I became aware of several biological imperatives simultaneously.

"Listen, if there is even the most Istan-forsaken chance that you can understand what I'm saying, I am hungry, thirsty and in desperate need of a bush and a few quiet moments." As I record this moment now in my journal, I am struck by how foolish the illustrative nod I gave toward my crotch must have looked.

It was then I received my fifth instruction on the J'hol. A tendril of consciousness swept its way through my mind

Illustration by Wayne Reynolds, courtesy WotC



and I heard with startling clarity, "This one has met men many. Your soft words are known, but to speak them is less, and weak."

My ears perceived no sound, the mandibles never moved, but nonetheless I heard the words in my mind. The tone was oddly lilting and the grammar manifestly atrocious, but the meaning was clear enough. Somehow, I knew the tone was masculine. I can't be sure how I discerned this, but I did.

"Man hungry," it continued, then reached down and ripped a leg of the Steppe Hunter, and walked over to me with a strange gate born of backward knees and insectile movement. He thrust the hairy leg in my face. "Eat."

If one has never been within licking distance of a Hunter leg, allow me to firmly attest they are more vile smelling and quelling to the appetite than could possibly be imagined. I gagged and shook my head violently.

"I can't eat such a thing, certainly not raw!"

"Raw?"

"Uncooked. You understand? Fire?" This conversation consisting of audible speech from me and mental impressions from the J'hol had become comfortable with remarkable speed. Not the content, mind you, just the medium.

"Man wants fire," he spoke in my head, then audibly, "Tssssk! Chk!" This is the best rendering I can provide for the sound the J'hol produced.

In moments the creature had gathered bits of gnarled wood and dry scrub brush, then produced a dagger from somewhere I couldn't see and neatly sliced the bonds on my hands and feet.

"Make fire," it commanded.

I dusted my robe and stood up on knees that creaked in protest. I tapped my side and felt the reassuring bulk of my belt pouch, which contained (most importantly) my journal and quill, flint and steel, a bit of dry ration, and two specimens of scrubhopper I'd collected earlier in the day. My water flask was blessedly intact on my left hip.

In moments, the fire crackled with blessed warmth as the last of the sun's rays fell beneath the mountains. "My name is Zabin. What is yours?" I asked.

"Name. Wet tongue can not make," there was a moment of hesitation. "Say Tik-Kall."

"Good health keep you, Tik-Kall. Thank you for, well, for not eating me and for allowing me to have some warmth. I suspect my kind is not as hardy in the face of the temperature extremes here as yours would be."

"Eating. Not yet chosen."

It took a moment for the words to register. Not chosen, as in, still on the table. Ah, terrible idiom. I proffered a wan smile and decided against reminding the J'hol of my skin condition. The state of the desiccated Steppe Hunter left

me little doubt that this creature possessed none of my culinary qualms.

"Well, then thank you for not eating me yet. May I ask, how will such a thing be chosen?"

No response.

"Tik-Kall, I'm going to walk to that bush over there and relieve myself. I assure you I will not run."

"Run. Then chosen."

Well, the meaning of that was clear enough. After watering a particularly angry looking bush filled with thorns that resembled fishhooks, I returned to my rock and set my journal on my lap.

The J'hol tilted its head but made no move to stop me as I began writing this account and sketching the creature. I realize this may seem an odd thing to do in such a moment, but I've always found penning my journeys and a quick sketch can help steady the wits and give a bit of clarity. I confess with appropriate modesty to being unusually quick with both. Tik-Kall simply observed, demonstrating the ability to remain utterly motionless for several minutes. It was at once eerie and wonderfully conducive for a subject being documented and drawn.

"Are you alone? I have always understood your kind travelled in... packs? No, not the right word, but I'm sure you take my meaning."

After enough time passed that I thought he wouldn't answer, "No clutch." The words carried a sense of wistfulness alloyed with resolve. I found the longer we conversed, the more emotion and intent was being conveyed beyond simply the words. I don't know if this was a result of my acclimation or Tik-Kall becoming more comfortable traipsing through my mind.

"Ah, I see. I have a family, a clutch, consisting of a lovely but querulous wife, two whip-smart daughters, and a mother-in-law that would likely fit into your society quite nicely." I penciled the wispy antenna that moved through the air seemingly of their own accord. "What happened to your clutch?"

"No." The word carried both intent and finality. This subject was a firmly closed door. A span of what must have been close to an hour passed, the night grew darker and Tik-Kall simply stood motionless, studying me with that passionless gaze.

As I rendered what I feel to be an admirable representation of those bizarre eyes, the J'hol spoke to my mind once more, "You. Humble Scholar? What clutch-role this?"

"What? Oh, that. Yes, I study things, gather specimens, sketch and catalogue what I discover and bring them back to... to my people. See?" I held up the almost complete sketch for him to see. Hence, lesson six: the J'hol, or at least this one, do not appreciate the capture of their likeness. At all. In less time than it might take my eye to

contemplate a blink, I was snatched and lifted until my face was inches from razor-sharp mandibles that were moving in a fashion that resembled anticipatory mastication.

"Life thief!" Came as a deafening mind-shout that echoed in my skull for several moments and left me feeling as though I had run headlong into a wall with great vigor.

"What?!" I quailed. "No no, it is not magic, or thieving, or any such thing. I use this to teach others; I will tell them of you, of your kind, of what you look like and of how frighteningly powerful you are. It is how I pass knowledge on to my people." My breath was ragged and my heart thundered as though it sought to break through my chest and flee.

I'm not sure what precisely it was about my words that spared me, but I suspect it had something to do with "passing knowledge to my people". Or perhaps it was just his disgust at my craven wailing, but whatever the reason, Tik-Kall dropped me without warning back onto my rock.

I lay there for several moments panting before I realized the J'hol still stood over me, motionless and threatening.

"Za-bin." Was that a note of pity I felt? "Finish," he kicked the journal toward me. "Then eat. Sorry. Hungry. Will save book for your clutch."

It was thus I found myself with trembling hands and tears dripping on the pages as I penned

these remaining words and finished the sketch. There had been no malice in his words, more a sense of true respect and honor. A hunter gives to his prey before consumption. In some divine irony, knowing I was about to die gave my illustration a quality and life beyond my talents. Small recompense for being eaten, but at least my last work is well done.

Assala, please forgive my "querulous" remark.



Illustration by Tom Baxa, courtesy WoTC

You know I love your fire. And please don't let your mother read this. For my last words here, I speak peace, love and honor to my family, bitter plague to my enemies. I will ask the J'hol to find my horse and place this journal in the saddlebag. A good slap to the rump and Kaz will return home as surely as a messenger pigeon. I pray Tik-Kall gives me this small kindness. Goodbye.

Well then! Praise to all the gods and Istus twice! I, Zabin Al'Xin, yet live! It has been two days since I wrote my goodbye. I have left the words of my journal as I wrote them that night, with perhaps a few literary embellishments added as garnish to the dish, that I might give you the most accurate view of my terrifying almost-final moments. I also took the time to add some color to my sketch. Without question the best piece I've ever produced.

How can such a thing be, that I should escape a most certain and gruesome demise? Perhaps an act of

heroism? My reader already knows me better. A clever ruse to trick the J'hol into releasing me? Alas for poor Kaz, this was not the case. Thus, I learned my seventh and final lesson of their nature. It would seem that J'hol (or, again, perhaps just this one) prefer horse meat above "pale man flesh". It was thus, at the mention of Kaz, that Tik-Kall pushed me to lead him toward my noble beast. In a turn of the fates, it was I who received a slap on the rump and sped home as Tik-Kall fell with devouring rapacity upon my pitiful steed.

Of all the strange things that night, the most unexpected was a final message that filtered into my mind as I ran for my life. "Za-Bin come again. Tik-Kall will not eat. Hunt together. Humble Scholar together."

Stranger yet, I think perhaps I just may test fate once more and try him at his word. There are more lessons to be learned.



WHERE THE KREEN ARE

Ecology of the J'hol thri-kreen of Oerth

By Kristoph Nolen

The thri-kreen and their subraces are one of many creatures in D&D which exist in various settings. There are thri-kreen in officially published material for Greyhawk, but very little is known about them. But, we can use other official sources which describe them to learn more about the thri-kreen of Oerth.

The kreen are most notable for being from the desert world of **Athas**. Though the creation of the *thri-kreen* pre-dates the creation of that world by nearly a decade, they did not become popular in common gaming until the publication of the *Dark Sun* setting in 1991. They were already published in both the *Monster Manual* and in *Monstrous Compendium* appendices in 1983 and 1989, and had made an appearance in Spelljammer materials in 1990.

The kreen are now iconic and are strongly associated with psionics. There are, however, both psionic and non-psionic thri-kreen, as well as other subspecies of kreen on other worlds. The supplement *Thri-kreen of Athas* (1995) has an entire sidebar detailing this, called *Where the Kreen Are* under the *Thri-kreen of Other Worlds* section, which addresses each of the major settings published by TSR at the time individually. For the WORLD OF GREYHAWK, it says,

"On Oerth, thri-kreen are rare. They are unknown in the Bright Desert, though there could be a few scattered packs in the Dry Steppes. Stories are told of thri-kreen packs roaming the Sea of Dust beyond the Hellfurnaces. Thri-kreen

of Oerth are similar in almost every way to the red-shelled J'hol, and have the standard chances for psionics."

Let's take a look at what this short entry tells us, and how we can use this information to expand what we know of the thri-kreen of Oerth - the j'hol. The passage makes several interesting points:

- they are very scarce
- where they *are* and *are not* found
- where their presence is speculated and where information is known about them
- (perhaps most importantly) *which type* of thri-kreen there are on Oerth.

The first point is that we know there are exceedingly few kreen on Oerth, and they are nearly unknown in the Flanaess. This is most likely because their typical habitat is usually arid, hot climes where there is little or no vegetation and even less water.

Next, no kreen of any kind are known in the **Bright Desert**, possibly because there were none in what once was a lush, temperate region before it was magically altered by **Shattados'** use of the **Scorpion Crown**. There are some, however, who make their home in the lands to the west of the mountain chain comprised of the **Barrier Peaks**, **Crystalmists**, and **Hellfurnaces**. Since the **Sea of Dust** just west of the Flanaess is an area not unlike the **Sea of Silt** in Dark Sun, it is entirely plausible for a DM to make a sub-setting there using

inspiration from *Dark Sun* with only a little modification.

Lastly, it tells us which subspecies of tohr-kreen are on Oerth. The “j’hol” mentioned are one of the many forms or subspecies of creatures generally known as “kreen” or “thri-kreen”, and information about them is the focus of the rest of this article.

The *Thri-kreen of Athas* describes the j’hol thus:

“J’hol feet are narrow, and lack the membranes that give [other thri-kreen] better purchase on sand. J’hol are built for the stony barrens and rocky badlands of their nation.”

The *Monstrous Compendium Appendix II* (1995) goes further:

“A j’hol has red chitin, three claws per hand, and large antennae. A j’hol’s abdomen is small compared to other kreens, and the j’hol is almost humanoid in appearance. ...

Popular professions among j’hol include the psionicist and all warrior professions. Gladiators are rare among j’hol, but j’hol enjoy combat and like watching gladiatorial contests; their arenas are some of the most popular....

J’hol ... make fine clothing and tools, and they are the only kreen who routinely work metal. J’hol make beautiful crystalline weapons.”

These “crystalline weapons” referred to are, perhaps, one of the most iconic things about the thri-kreen other than their appearance. The natural material they are made from is called *dasl*. The word itself means “crystal”; specifically, thri-kreen crystal, made by combining venom, herbs, and sand. It implies reverence, because the root word it comes from, *da*, is the “way of priests”. The *dasl* is made in a raw form, then hand-sculpted into weapons which are socially and culturally significant.

Many other subspecies of thri-kreen have venomous bites which most j’hol do not possess. 95% of all j’hol use their venom in the making of *dasl*. The reason for this is somewhat unclear. It is possible their glands don’t produce enough to make their bites venomous, so they use it for something else. Or maybe it’s a cultural preference, and if they stop making the *dasl* their venom glands would fill enough to affect their bites, given enough time.

One small note: the thri-kreen of Oerth are *technically* of the subspecies known as *tohr-kreen*, which means they are not nomads and instead have settlements as large as cities.

“J’hol are more inclined toward building and crafting than other tohr-kreen. Their cities are elaborately made, and usually quite large, with vast parks, ornate decorations, high walkways, and tall spires.”

The cities themselves are not often depicted in any sourcebooks. Below is one of the few illustrations of a tohr-kreen city. The particular look of the architecture gives these cities a particular aesthetic that seems very alien and unconventional.

“Some buildings are a hundred feet tall or more, and the translucent amber reflects the sun in patterns on the sand. Domes and towers reach to the sky, while walkways and ramps stretch around and between the structures. ... [a tohr-kreen city] looks as if it was grown instead of built. Most non-kreen find the appearance of the city rather macabre, almost disturbing, with its spires, walkways, and domes, the membranes stretching between some structures, and the presence of overwhelming numbers of kreen ...”

Since the very rare reports of thri-kreen encounters in the Sea of Dust region are invariably small groups of scouts, it must be assumed that any j’hol cities are likely especially rare, extraordinarily well hidden, and far into the Sea of Dust.

There could easily be entire cultures of thri-kreen inhabiting areas in Western Oerik, especially considering their cultural concepts. J’hol don’t have “families” in the same way some other humanoids do - they have “clutches”. Clutches can comprise groups like those born of the same egg-group, or social groups like close friends or adventuring parties. Several clutches make up a pack (kaluk) some being as large as a humanoid state, and packs make up a nation (lathuk). Humans don’t ascribe to the same tribe-like cultural ideas and so they assume small scouting groups of j’hol are distinct, isolated groups instead of members of a nation. In fact, the opposite is often true.

Something of a side note: in the D&D cosmology of the Great Wheel, all “primes” are considered to exist in “Crystal Spheres” - a different one for each setting’s solar system. Though it is unknown how or when, it is believed the kreen originated from Athas. It seems they spread elsewhere through the use of very powerful psionics.



Illustration by John Dollar, courtesy WotC

In the Spelljammer setting, an empire of thri-kreen was exploring wildspace as far back as 4 millenia ago. Originating from a legendary “Kreenspace” crystal sphere, it may have been these explorations that resulted in the colonization of many worlds. Today their wildspace representation is a mere shadow of its past glory.

As we can see, there is a lot of information about the j’hol thri-kreen, even in this small sample. A DM should feel comfortable using everything at their disposal they like to create their version of Oerth. Thri-kreen have been in every edition, so lore abounds and there’s a plethora of things a DM can do to make them unique.

They could be encountered in other places on Oerth, adventurers could step through a portal to a thri-kreen city deep in the Sea of Dust, they might become a behind-the-scenes adversary to prevent a thri-kreen city from being discovered, or they might meet a sage who’s spent time amongst the j’hol thri-kreen and lived to tell the tale! DMs should feel free to take the official material presented here and expand on it!



SECRET LEGACIES OF THE FLAN

Traditional Druidic Judgment: The Watchers of the Fields

By *Les Reno*

From the earliest days of human settlement onward, many Flan tribes residing in the vicinity of the Flanaess’s northern peat bogs followed a tradition in which transgressors paid a special price for crimes of murder, physical violation, and theft of crop or livestock. After hearing the evidence and performing whatever divination the circumstances required, the druid or priest would pass judgment on the accused. If the holy one found the person guilty, they would break an oak twig, spitting, then turn their back on the convicted soul, walking into hut or forest. Community elders would bind the hands and feet of the condemned and escort them into the bog, where delegates of the leading families, representatives of the wronged party, and a tribal necromancer awaited them. With the assistance of the tribe’s best hunter, the arcanist fed the condemned an acrid gruel consisting of ergot-tainted barley or rye mixed with crushed mandrake root. (Some variations involved the forced consumption of a bitter herb-based tea or liquor spiked with certain types of spider venom.) The assembly commenced a communal prayer of chants and drumming as the elders bound the malefactor into a fetal position. Using the overhanging branch of a tree, those most personally touched by the crime raised the delirious offender over the bog. At a signal from the spellcaster, they slowly lowered the restrained individual into the peat, feet and haunches first. The rhythmic invocation of the Goddess’s underworld aspect continued, gaining momentum, then reached crescendo and stopped. The body bobbed in the belching peat, disappearing bit by bit, the sudden silence as palpable as sweat, drugs amplifying the wrongdoer’s sense of being sucked into the land and swallowed. In the moment before complete

submersion, the necromancer salvaged the criminal’s soul and placed it in a jar or pot bearing a mark identical to one carved into the tree.

Once an interval of years prescribed by custom as punishment for the specific transgression had passed, the victims or their descendants would recover the corpse during Rising Fest, the celebration of the land’s renewal. The necromancer or a successor worked spells and incantations on the mummified flesh to prevent its decay from exposure to conditions outside the bog. Further spellcasting ensured absolute and permanent paralysis.

The soul was then returned to its body. When the tribesmen deposited their crops for the year, the wronged parties also planted the criminal’s remains, tied to a post and blessed by druid or priest, to keep watch against insect and beast and bird. Balance was restored. The individual who had harmed the community now safeguarded its livelihood. The preserved but mentally broken human scarecrow stood, radiating a mad, dread presence repulsive to all but the bravest and most desperate of animals—yet undetectable to the human population.



Illustration courtesy of WotC

The Flan called these condemned souls the Watchers of the Fields. Despite attempts by disgusted Oeridians to abolish what they saw as abomination, isolated enclaves reportedly continued the practice in secret long after the Aerdy completed their conquest of the region, disguising the Watchers as normal scarecrows with sacks and old clothing. Even today, hardened adventurers speak of an ancient, mostly ruined but inhabited settlement where the Griff Mountains overlook the Troll Fens. Others mention a pair of destitute thorps at the southern edge of the Cold Marshes. The pureblooded Flan living in these places allegedly mete out a modified version of the old punishment to perceived interlopers as well as lawbreakers, posting preserved corpses as a warning to outsiders. Because of certain details in the telling, scholars believe such tales are either paranoid exaggerations or represent a shift in focus from worship of Beory's chthonic aspect to adoration of Nerull the Reaper, with village necromancers now lording over their communities as surrogate priests.

Adventure Hooks

A player character of Flan descent comes from a family known for its bad luck. The PC suffers a series of dreams and hallucinations in which they experience their ancestor's punishment. They are tried, sentenced, and taken to the bog. The necromancer removes the soul from its body... and before it can be returned to the flesh, the village is destroyed. The ancestor's debt to the village was never paid. This is the source of the family curse. As the visions continue, the character sees the soul's present whereabouts. The vessel in which the soul resides is in the collection of a wealthy merchant or noble. The PC must find the location and acquire the vessel, gain access to the spells used in the old ceremonies, and discover the where the ancestor's body is. The process must be completed, soul and body brought together again. Then the PC and allies must submerge the mummified ancestor in the bog, cast Remove Curse or a similar spell, or burn the reconciled body and soul. (None of these things are guaranteed to work; they might result in disaster or comedy, per the DM's inclination or a roll of dice.)

While adventuring or working as a spy, an NPC associate of the party has disappeared in the vicinity of one of the Flan thorps by the Cold Marshes. These places are so wretched, the habitations and land without value and the people diminished in every way, that even Luz considers them inconsequential, not worth the effort. Or perhaps he finds their current situation amusing; maybe he even encourages it. The player characters discover that the two small communities have recently entered a phase of mutual destruction, each raiding the other for bodies to turn into Watchers. Both groups experience the desire to create more Watchers and the need to make more

children as a kind of religious mania. The necromancer governing each location is convinced that only through depriving his neighbor of followers will he and *his* followers prove their superiority.

A patron hires the PCs to recover a lost Flan artifact or Ur-Flan tome from ancient ruins by the Griff Mountains. (See *Luz the Evil*, pg. 72). The ruins in question are occupied by members of a Flan tribe who have taken heavy casualties in a recent conflict with the Troll Fens' monstrous inhabitants. Maybe the players save the chief's son or some other tribe member on their way to the site. The locals are grateful, but they will be considerably less than welcoming if and when the PCs attempt to abscond with the item they've been sent to find. The tribe considers the object holy, and anyone other than the tribal priest who touches the thing is sentenced to become a Watcher...

The party seeks rest in a friendly, quaint-seeming village. After a few days, the village stirs with excitement. A trial takes place. The village leaders escort the condemned into the bog. Do the PCs react? Do their own religious, cultural, or personal convictions conflict with the values of their hosts? Do they allow the prisoner to be transformed into a Watcher of the Fields, or do they take action?

DM's Notes

The idea of druids serving as advisors and arbiters in small communities inspired this piece, as did the likelihood that Beory, as a mother goddess figure, would have both fertility and chthonic associations for her followers. The land as womb, but also as tomb. Several Greyhawk publications connect the Ur-Flan with dark magic, especially necromancy. We know that the druids of the Old Faith are said to have learned Ur-Flan secrets from Vecna, and it makes sense that the Ur-Flan would teach what they considered minor skills to gifted Flan servants, raising them above their fellows in order to provoke resentments and rivalries. What if these chosen Flan refined these skills and passed their secrets from generation to generation? How do Flan communities at the margins of or outside the Old Faith view necromancy? Might some communities allow the practice not as a way of cheating death or serving it to the detriment of natural life, but as a means to address an imbalance caused by conscious wrongdoing?

Of course, in most cases, when the necromancer also adopts the role of judge, questions about guilt are bound to become troubling...



LORE OF THE PHOSTWOOD TREE

A Study of the Use and Craft of Luminous Wood

By Lance Hawvermale — lancehawvermale.com

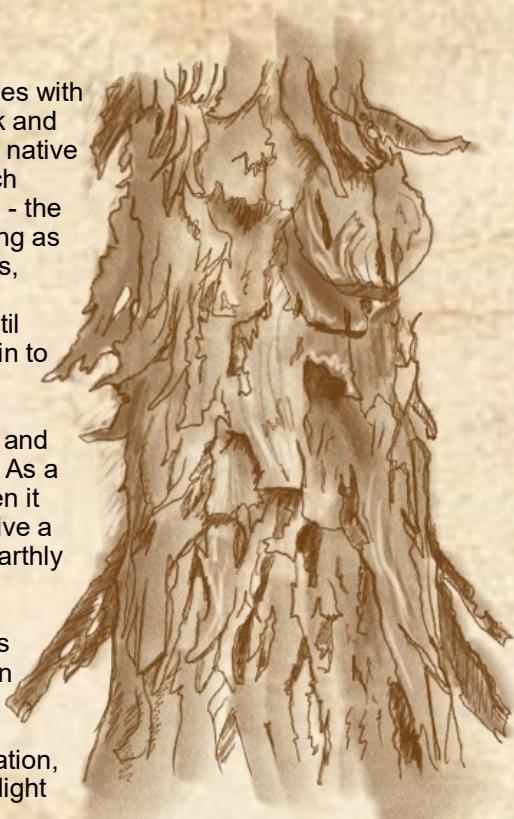
From the unpublished *Trees of the Flanaess*, by
Canaldryn the Spry, sage of dendrology

Hookhill, Gran March
Fireseek 17th, 558 CY

On the eve of my fiftieth birthday, I boarded a cart that had been designed for my comfort and instructed my guides to deliver me across the Duchy and into the Phostwood forest. My escorts—a pair of married rangers known as Enyi and Boab—spoke Flan to each other but defaulted to the Common Tongue when reporting back to me regarding any dangers on the trail. Luckily, these perils were avoided, thanks to the rangers' quick feet. Steadfast folk from Tenh, they were as dependable as they were introverted.

Our small caravan arrived at the Phostwood just as I had planned it—by night. At first there was little to see, as the heavy boughs blocked the night sky and its constellations. But the deeper we ventured; the more luminescence appeared. If you have never been fortunate enough to witness a phostwood, let me assure you that the stories are true: dying phostwood gives off an eerie light.

These storied trees with their shaggy bark and broad leaves are native to the forest which bears their name - the Phostwood. Living as long as 300 years, phostwoods are unremarkable until they die and begin to decay, at which point their wood glows with a soft and foreboding light. As a sage, I have taken it upon myself to give a name to this unearthly gleam: phost-fire. Rotting phostwood trunks look ghostly when spied on a dark night. As a source of illumination, phost-fire sheds light 5 feet in all directions. Over time, phost-fire dims, the wood slowly turning to dust.



Nothing made from phostwood is permanent. Even the most skilled woodworker fails to produce a lasting product from phostwood. However, its evanescent nature is attractive to artists who wish to express the fleeting nature of mortals in the eyes of the gods. One such sculptor, Nikavo of Redspan, pays routine homage to Lirr, goddess of poetry and art. Nikavo's grandiose works flicker with phost-fire until decaying under the sun, a reminder to us all that art—like beauty—is transient.

Wood

Impermanence aside, phostwood serves many practical purposes. Small amounts of decaying phostwood are used like candles to illuminate dark places. Heavier bundles provide sufficient lighting for larger workspaces or even as signals atop watchtowers. Many an adventurer has been known to pocket a small amount as an emergency light while exploring shadowy passages. Glowing phostwood radiates no discernable heat, so carrying it is quite safe.

Leaves

Phostwood leaves have a width twice that of their length, giving them a broad and somewhat bulbous shape. As far as botanists have been able to discern, the tree's leaves play no part in the still-unexplained phenomenon of phost-fire. Those same leaves, however, display a remarkable hydrophobic tendency, repelling water at a very efficient



rate. Seeing this, it is no surprise that woodcutters, travelers, and artisans make ready use of phostwood leaves as a layer of rain protection. Though the leaves are too delicate to be stitched together, if properly glued down with sap or tree resin, they fully protect the user from rainstorms for a period of 2d4 hours, after which time they begin to separate and tear.

If ground with mortar and pestle, the leaves may be treated by an herbalist for smoking in a pipe. When lit, the mixture causes the pipe's bowl to glow dimly. The enjoyment of smoking phostwood leaves is said by connoisseurs to be an acquired taste.

Roots

A favorite legend in the taverns of Wintershiven would have us believe ancient humanoid tribes who first settled the region worshipped phostwood trees as incarnations of their deities. Little evidence supports this claim. However, a few elder gray elves, such as the 1800-year-old Oenvyr Ifina, assert that phostwood roots have been used for generations as ingredients in powerful, dream-inducing aromatics. A cleric can transform the fine, fibrous material extracted from phostwood roots into *incense of meditation*.

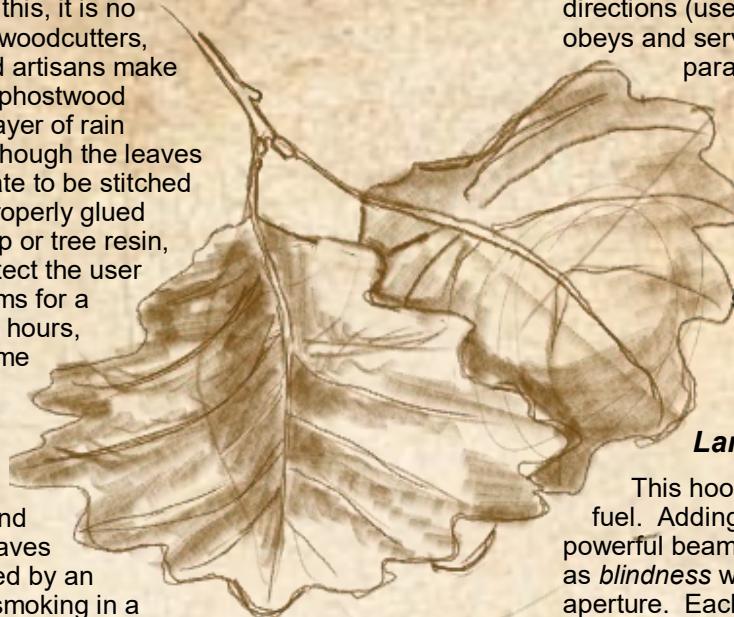
Bark: Crumbled phostwood bark may be sprinkled on the ground to serve as a faintly glowing marker that aids travelers in mazes and deep woods. The small particles glow for $(2d4+1)\times 10$ minutes, clearly marking the return route until they fade.

PHOSTWOOD MAGIC ITEMS

Over the years, my apprentices and I have researched and crafted several unique magic items, using primarily ingredients harvested from phostwood trees.

Figurine of Wondrous Power (Phostwood Glowworm)

Like other *figurines of wondrous power*, this appears to be a 1-inch statuette, specifically of a wooden worm. When the phostwood glowworm is placed on the ground and the correct command word spoken, it becomes a giant living worm that radiates light in all



directions (use the statistics for a giant slug). The creature obeys and serves its owner, within the standard parameters of other such figurines. If the *phostwood glowworm* is broken or destroyed in its statuette form, it is forever ruined. Likewise, it decays over time like all phostwood, so that it may be called upon only 3d6 times before losing all magical properties. If slain in giant worm form, the figurine simply reverts to a statuette that can be used again later.

Lantern of the Dying Light

This hooded lantern burns only phostwood as fuel. Adding a small amount causes the device to emit a powerful beam that can render a target creature sightless as *blindness* when the hood is closed to a specific aperture. Each such use requires one charge. The phostwood fuel provides 1d6 charges before flickering out. The *lantern of the dying light* may be used indefinitely so long as it is supplied with sufficient fuel. However, its eldritch light tends to attract unwanted attention; with each use, there is a 10% chance that a will-o-wisp (hp 39) is drawn to investigate.

Philter of Phost-fire

The poets would have us believe that dead phostwood contains a memory of its living days. This potion was created to honor that sentiment, granting the imbiber the ability to see into the past. He or she may touch the remains of any deceased humanoid and immediately experience a vision of their moment of death, understanding the way they perished as if standing nearby when it occurred.

Wand of Bright Decay

This wand is carved from phostwood and contains 80+1d20 charges when discovered. The wand has three functions, each activated by a different command word:

- 1 charge – *dancing lights*
- 2 charges – *faerie fire*
- 3 charges – The target begins to decay, like phostwood in its final days. On a successful saving throw, the target is sickened, suffering a -2 on Strength and Dexterity checks for 1 full turn. If the saving throw is failed, the target also suffers a condition similar to mummy rot, as per the disease inflicted by mummies.





Captain of the Greenjerkins, Stalmaer

By Paul Herridge

Fergus is a 54-year-old human man, of a lesser noble family from Furyondy (exact location is GM's choice). His father was originally a ranger by trade, his mother a lady in waiting to a higher noble.

History

When Fergus turned 18, he decided, with his father's blessing, to join the Greenjerkins – the most well-reputed local ranger group. His father agreed, though his mother hated the idea of losing her boy. With minimum supplies, he left his parents' home a week later and travelled for many days through the wilds of the Gold County travelling towards Stalmaer. He had some minor adventures on the journey, but they are of little relevance here...

Once in Stalmaer, he took a room at the local Inn (the Plum and Apples) to clean up and rest. The next morning, well fed and rested, he headed to the rangers base of operations with a bounce in his step, certain of his admission to the 'Jerkins...

Elmheart Keep, the name of the Greenjerkins base (named for the large Elm that resided inside the wooden walls) consisted of an incomplete fortified wall and partially built stone keephouse, with tents everywhere.

After presenting himself to the guards and asking to speak with the Greenjerkins leader, he was soon escorted to a meeting with a late middle age, short, balding man. The man was discussing how best to address a problem with four other men gathered around his desk. Apparently a town called 'Weeping Willows' had recently been attacked and its people taken to be sold as slaves by bandits who were apparently led by a large half-orc. The raid was quite effective; out of twenty-four villagers, only three got away.

Although the other four Greenjerkins were there prior to him arriving, they were dismissed when Fergus was noticed. Only the bald man remained. He turned to face Fergus and said 'You wanted my attention. You have it, for a minute or two. Please don't waste my time for your sake...'

Fergus introduced himself and offered a letter of introduction from his father. Osint (the bald-headed Greenjerkins leader) read the letter and inspected Fergus from top to bottom.

'So you fancy yourself a Greenjerkin, huh? The Jerkins are the best of the best of all rangers anywhere' (said with no modesty, simply a fact in Osint's mind)... 'You don't look like you have what it takes. If it wasn't for this - ', he waved the letter, 'and the fact I know and respect your father, I would have you removed for wasting my time.'

Fergus' resolve waved slightly at this. He had never considered the Greenjerkins might not want him!

'So, how can you prove you deserve a place here? What can you do to convince me you have the right stuff to join

the Greenjerkins?'...

After a few moments of pondering this question, Fergus came forward to look at the map on the desk – 'Sir, would you give me a chance if I fixed your half-orc bandit problem? By myself I mean, sir?'

Osint raised his head sharply and stared at the young lad, unsure if this was some joke or not. 'Lad, that would be dangerous for an experienced Jerkin... this might be too much for you yet.'

'Sir, no sir' replied Fergus. 'You lose nothing if I fail. If I can't sort this problem, I won't come back here. If I do, all I ask is to be given a chance to train and be one of the best, sir.'

Osint looked the lad directly in his eyes, weighing his true intentions. Seeing no lies, he spoke 'Very well, try. Bring me proof that the problem is resolved. If you do, you will train with the finest woodsmen we have!'

Fergus smiled, looked at the place marked on the map, and said 'I had better get to it then, sir. Thank you for your time.'

He then left the room, the fort, and headed from Stalmaer into the west end of the Gnarley Forest, heading to the small dorf of Willows Weep*, whence the people had been taken.

A week later a dishevelled Fergus limped to the improved front gates of the fort and asked to speak with Osint. He wasn't received well as he looked a mess, and if not for the fact he was accompanied by Gof, the headman of Willows Weep (who was also a bit of a mess) who vouched for Fergus with the Greenjerkins he knew from previous visits to Elmheart, Fergus might not have gotten in at all.

After maybe 20 minutes they were let into Osint's offices. Osint looked shocked and surprised at first, as Gof was one of the ones taken by the slavers. He allowed them both to sit and ordered refreshments.

It turns out Fergus single-handedly took care of the bandits using stealth, traps, and trickery to lure them away one at a time. Some were captured, some were killed. The half-orc leader followed Fergus off a cliff/waterfall down a zip-line he rigged. When the half-orc was halfway down, Fergus sliced the rope, dropping the heavily armored half-orc into a pond. Working his way out of the pond, the bandit made it to the shore while Fergus peppered him with arrows. It then came to single combat, and while the enraged slaver stabbed Fergus in the leg with a hornblade, Fergus managed to remove his opponent's head. Fergus then freed the slaves. Two had been killed in sport by the slavers, but the rest were alive, although emotionally ruined.

The rest is history. Osint set Fergus to training, and over

the next 15 years and many close calls, Fergus rose through the Jerkins ranks to become Osint's 2nd in command. He was promoted to leader of the Greenjerkins by Osint on his retirement 8 years ago.

Fergus is now a popular and efficient leader, who hasn't been shy of 'getting his hands dirty' when the occasion merited it. He has received a commendation from the leader of the Gold County, Countess Rhavelle, for services rendered in keeping the lands safe when Fergus, with the Jerkins, helped drive off a renegade pack of werewolves from the Gleaming Glades with the aid of the Obad-Hai Druids. The Jerkins are still known as the best of the best, and have also received commendations on no less than two occasions!

He rarely visits his remaining family now since his parents passed away but writes every couple of months to his beloved sister Elspeth, now married and a teacher by trade, with two children of her own.

Description

Fergus stands around 5 foot 10 inches, and has a slightly above medium body frame. While still carrying his muscle well, he has now got a slight bulge to the belly – nothing that worries him yet, but it is sure to grow unless he throws himself (and probably his poor Greenjerkins) into an even more thorough exercise plan.

He has a friendly but stern face and doesn't smile often enough. He has curly short dark brown, near black hair, with just a few grey hairs showing through. He has a 1" scar just below his right eye. His eyes are a dark blue. He has a Van Dyke beard, and sideburns. His skin is ruddy from many years working in the sun. As said above, on cold days he walks with a slight limp.

* [Author's Note: Willows Weep is a fictional town added to the Gnarley Forest for this backstory. It was placed on the far side of hex F221-181 (notation from [Anna Meyer's Map](#)), close to the border of Dyvers. It is a small hamlet with less than 30 residents.]

Captain Fergus Matremand

Male Human Ranger 10 - CR 7

Lawful Good Humanoid; Background: Folk Hero; Age: 54; Height: 5' 8"; Weight: 115lb.; Eyes: Brown; Hair: Dark, short, curly; Skin: Ruddy

Speed 30 ft ; **Proficiency** +4; **HP** 130; **HD** 10d10

Stat	Score/Modifier	Saving Throw
STR	16	+3
DEX	17	+3
CON	16	+3
INT	16	+3
WIS	16	+3
CHA	14	+2

Languages Common ; Goblin ; Elvish ; Orc ; Gnomish

Spells & Powers

Spell Slots

3rd level O O

2nd level O O O

1st level O O O O

Ranger spells known (CL 5th)

Spell Save DC :15

Spell Attack : +7

3rd—conjure animals, daylight

2nd—animal messenger, beast sense

1st—cure wounds, hunter's mark

Weapons:

+1 Longbow

Ranged, both hands: +8, 8 (1d8+4) piercing
Rng: 150 ft./600 ft. Ammunition, Heavy, Two-Handed

Dagger +1 - Whisperblade

Ranged: +8, 6 (1d4+4) piercing
Ranged w/ offhand: +8, 6 (1d4+4) piercing
Ranged offhand: +8, 6 (1d4+4) piercing
Rng: 20 ft./60 ft.
Finesse, Light, Thrown

Longsword +2 – Ripper

Main hand: +9, 9 (1d8+5) slashing
Both hands: +9, 10 (1d10+5) slashing; Versatile

Scimitar of Speed

Main hand: +9, 8 (1d6+5) slashing
Main w/ offhand: +9, 8 (1d6+5) slashing
Offhand: +9, 8 (1d6+5) slashing
Finesse, Light

Spell Attack

Ranged: +7, As Spell, Range : 0

Skill Name, Total, Ability, Prof, Temp

Acrobatics, +3, DEX, (3),
Animal Handling, +7, WIS (3), +4
Arcana, +3, INT, (3),
Athletics, +3, STR, (3),
Deception, +2, CHA, (2), -
History, +3, INT, (3),
Insight, +7, WIS, (3), +4
Intimidation, +2, CHA, (2), -
Investigation, +3, INT, (3), -
Medicine, +3, WIS, (3), -
Nature, +7, INT, (3), +4
Perception, +3, WIS, (3),
Performance, +2, CHA, (2), -
Persuasion, +2, CHA, (2), -
Religion, +3, INT, (3),
Sleight of Hand, +3, DEX, (3), -
Stealth, +7, DEX, (3), +4
Survival, +7, WIS, (3), +4

Feats

Weapon Master (Dexterity)

You gain proficiency with four simple or martial weapons of your choice.

Weapon Master (Longbow, Dagger) You gain

proficiency with four simple or martial weapons of your choice. Weapon Master (Longsword, Scimitar)

Other Proficiencies:

Tools: Carpenter's tools (+4); Land vehicles (+4)

Weapons allowed: Martial weapons;

Simple weapons; Dagger; Longbow

Longsword; Scimitar **Armor allowed:** Light armor; Medium armor; Shields

Tools: Carpenter's tools (+4); Land vehicles (+4)

Special Abilities

Beast Master

Extra Attack

Forest & Grassland & Swamp

Hide in Plain Sight

Favoured Enemy: Humanoids (Orc & Goblinoid)

Ranger's Companion: Has a bond with animals.

Unique among rangers, they can bond with multiple animals of any kind, creating a group of wild and loyal creatures.

Land's Stride

At 6th level, moving through nonmagical difficult terrain costs you no extra movement. You can also pass through nonmagical plants without being slowed by them and without taking damage from them if they have thorns, spines, or a similar hazard.

You also have advantage on saving throws against plants that are magically created or manipulated to impede movement, such those created by the entangle spell.

Primeval Awareness

At 3rd level, you use your action and expend one ranger spell slot to focus your awareness on the region around you. For 1 minute per level of the spell slot you expend, you can sense whether the following are present within 1 mile of you (or within up to 6 miles if you are in your favored terrain): aberrations, celestials, dragons, elementals, fey, fiends, and undead. This feature doesn't reveal the creatures' location or number.

Rustic Hospitality

You fit in with the commoners, you can easily find a place to hide, rest or recuperate among them, unless

you gave them a reason to distrust you.

They will help you hide from the law or someone searching for you as long as it doesn't put themselves in harm's way.

Notes For GMs :

Fergus has a slight posh accent; a well-spoken gentleman-type, but with a sternness in his tone.

In cold weather he walks with a slight limp, the long-term effect of the leg wound he took in his youth.

He doesn't suffer fools – whenever possible he will talk to the most sensible person present, not speaking to fools unless directly spoken to.

He dresses in typical woodsmen's garb when in his office or working, but dons his armor and a uniform that was gifted to him when training troops or on official duties. He has a formal uniform for the occasional times he visits or is visited by VIP's.

He is not very trusting, but remembering the chance Osint gave him, will usually give people he doesn't know one chance. It's rare for him to give a second chance. Once a person (or group) has proven themselves, he is much more likely to approach them in need.

He has two animal companions – a falcon called Drift, and a horse named Hoska, listed below.

Drift

Male Hawk (Falcon)

Neutral; Tiny Beast

Background: Moody, temperamental, surly... you get the idea.

Hoska

Male Riding Horse

Unaligned; Large Beast

Authors Comment :

After searching diligently on Google, Facebook groups, and other varied resources, I found little more than a paragraph or two describing the Greenjerkin Rangers. They were based in Stalmaer. They operated throughout the Gnarley Forest. There wasn't much else. So I did what all good GMs in need do – I did it myself.

This is a part for you to use. I hope you enjoy Fergus.



CULTISTS OF THARIZDUN #2

MIKE BRIDGES (MAY 2020)

THE VAULT OF DAOUD



Iggwilv negotiates for information

By Thomas Kelly — GreyhawkStories.com

At first glance, it seemed a featureless, endless plain, not that anyone would wish to even glance at it in the first place. The meaningless color of the sky over the unending and undulating landscape looked like the delusions of a fever-induced dream. The wind gibbered, chittered, screeched, screamed, and wailed. The putrescence of the ever-rotting world of puss and popping tumors assaulted the senses in waves. Her eyes watered; her senses reeled, and she asked herself, "Have I this time gone too far?" How far has she gone? Into the lower realms of the Abyss seeking a merciless fiend, a warrior of the Blood War, a restless unforgiven spirit of Oerth.

"Six centuries since I have been named by the likes of flesh and blood," the belching hezrou reflected as it tore the twitching limbs from the torso of a lesser tanar'ri. It carried out its grizzly task like one accustomed to his handiwork, like the skilled hands of a fisherman cleaning a fish. His victim, an enormous scorpion with the screeching head of a hag, spit and squealed with pain. The herzou warrior tossed the legless wriggling body aside and turned his full attention to the woman that stood before him. "By which devility didst thou findeth me, and what wouldst thou have of me?" The beast spoke an ancient dialect of Old Oeridian. A heavy perspiration of stinking liquid moistened the abomination's naked skin as if the effort of dismembering his foe had induced a heavy sweat. Nearly a half-ton of leering toad towered over the slight frame of the dark-haired girl. The nightmare beast peeled back its hideous lips to reveal rows of spiked teeth. It might have easily snatched the girl up and swallowed her whole. Or so it seemed.

"Not easily!" Tasha answered the question. She recoiled at the maleficent odor of the sticky goo slicking the creature's unholy flesh. She forced herself to swallow lest she wretch and lose her bearing in the presence of the fiend. "My quest for Your Ruthlessness began in my own personal tower on the outskirts of Lopolla where I applied myself to learn the lore of that land."

"Twas named Hlupallu in my day," the herzou swatted a vrock from the air, crumpling it against the stones. He crushed the writhing bird beneath his massive toady foot. Giant baby-faced maggots wriggled up from the ground to feast on the ichory flesh.

"Indeed. The same," Tasha continued undistracted by the

gooey carnage at her feet. "In the course of my studies, I came upon mention of a magnificent treasure vault, not-long concealed, containing wondrous magics once collected by the wandering mendicant, Daoud of Tusmit."

"Never heard of him," the hezrou feigned disinterest.

"But I have heard much, for much there is to hear! I would, if I may contrive it, pilfer all the baubles that one-time pasha possessed."

"What's that to me?" the toad-fiend croaked, but she had now piqued his interest.

"Went I first to the palace of Ibrahim, the son of Daoud, and showed myself to be a type of lady in their presence. I did murder my way to prominence in his harem, slay my rivals and, using what powers of persuasion I possess, seduced the pasha and quickly became the favorite. Then I said, 'Oh Ibrahim my lord, if't be true thou dost love me, thou wouldst indeed reveal unto me the secret place of thy father's wealth.' Spake he, 'I would tellest thee fairest of all flesh in trade for thine affections, but sworn am I to never reveal the place of that well-hidden vault.' Thus I did press upon him, night after night, and he became as soft putty in my fingers. At length he did succumb to say, 'One there is who mayest tell thee more. His name I revealest to thee for a price.' 'Name it,' said I. Said he, 'If ever thou shouldst gain entrance therein, I would have the ring that once my father wore. By that ring did he command the djinn, the efreet, the marid, and the dao.' To these terms I agreed, and he bade me swear most devastating oaths against my own soul should I betray him or fail to deliver the ring."

"So that one named me and sent thee hither?" the hezrou asked.

"Nay! Not so!" the girl cackled hideously with her own amusement. "He named one spellmaster and archmage called Pharol Al-Sammal who doth keep hidden temple to Hadyan and shrine of Boccob in the hills beyond Sefmur."

"Never heard of him," the hezrou dismissed the name.

"But I have heard much of him. Not long after your time, this Al-Sammal rose to prominence among the scholars of the Zashassar and now is numbered among the greatest spellcasters of all Oerth. Many liken him unto the Mad Mage of Greyhawk city. I knew too-well that if I should appear before that one, he would at once smell

me out. In my stead, I sent my sister, Fair Elena (may she rot) to learn the lore. Yet not without a price. Said that saucy tart to me, 'I should like the magical carpet upon which Pasha Daoud once did fly.' I trothed her that and, again, swore against my own soul most devastating oaths should I not deliver the shit-stained rug unto her hand."

"So then, that wizard What's-He-Called didst name me to her and sent thee hither?" the belching toad asked. The manner of the tale intrigued him not a little, and he sought to put the pieces of the puzzle together.

"Nay! By the One Who Yet Slumbers, again I say nay!" the girl swore. Her green eyes shone keenly as lit by some inner devility of her own. "This wizard called Pharal al Samal told my sister the tale of one spellcaster and summoner more ancient than himself. He it was that built the treasure vault of Daoud, hid it away from all eyes, and entrapped it with magical traps, wards, sigils, seals, devices, and triggers such that none might ever pilfer it, no matter how puissant. If ever I hoped to find the vault or trespass therein, I should first need acquire the passwords and keys, and these are known by none but their creator, the Archmage Survarris of the Ekbir Zashassar, a disciple of the Black Vizier of Zeif (if not the man himself)."

"Aha! Tis not me thou dost seek, but that fiddle-sucker Survarris! I might have known, for he was once-a-time my master in the Zashassar—before the unfortunate incident." The abominable toad's tone turned melancholy. A pensive sigh escaped his throat.

"Indeed! I seek Survarris. But where should I find him? Not on all Oerth, for he had been cast into the Nine Hells where none who live are accustomed to walk. I besought my twisted mother, that child-abducting old crone who dwells in the poultry-legged hut, and I begged her go to Hell to find Survarris for me. Not without a price did she agree, 'I should like Daoud's ancient tome, *Manual of the Planes*, which the Tusmistite stole from the Charcoal Palace in the City of Brass.' I swore to my mother, against my very own soul, that I should deliver the book unto her hand.

"When my mother, the Mother of Witches, did find Survarris, she discovered his slain and tormented body bereft of his soul. 'To where has this one's soul been removed?' she inquired. Those baatezu devils that knew his fate replied, 'If we tell thee, thou shalt give us a token from among the spoils.' 'Name thy price,' spake my mother on my own part. They made demand, 'Daoud possessed a Cube of Gates. We have need of such a toy that makes easy coming and going from world to world.' They bade her speak devastating curses against my soul if I deliver it not unto them. For that promise, the devils did reveal the whereabouts of the missing soul, and they did name none but thee, O Merciless One, the jailer of it.

Moreover, they revealed unto my mother the place where the soul of Survarris now sulks."

"In this cranny-crammed cranium sulks that maggot's soul," the herzou laughed. The stench of his laughter caused Tasha to blanche despite her stoic resolve. A blackened-crystal human skull engraved with silvery sigils and glowing with unoerthly grey aura appeared hovering in the syrup-like air beside the enormous fiend. The skull floated at the creature's right shoulder. "Survarris didst create this gewgaw from the skull of an Ur-flan lich. But I didst bind his soul up in it and entrap him in his own trap. So he remaineth, mine own prisoner inside this bony noggin. Thus did I repay a debt for a treachery the bleeder once did visit upon me when I yet served as his apprentice in the Zashassar."

So close now to her objective, Tasha's voice tremored, "Allow me to query him. Surely Thy Mercilessness can compel thine old master to reveal those cyphers, codes, and passwords I shall require to look upon the secret vault and safely trespass therein!"

"Ha! By the blood and bones! What wouldst thou give unto me if I should favor thee. Hast thou not already promised away the ring, the rug, the book, and the cube?"

Tasha considered the matter but a moment before inquiring sweetly, "How did Your Mercilessness come to this fetid place? Perhaps I can yet show thee some favor." The girl stood straight and shapely-tall before him. She thrust forward her chin, and she appeared all the more beautiful by way of the contrast with his oozing putridness. Recently come into full blossom and yet clad in the harem scarves of Lopolla, she enchanted the herzou with her comeliness, the flowing black hair, the keen intelligent countenance, and the wicked green eyes that gleamed like evil emeralds.

"How camest I unto this place? Shall I indeed tell thee the tale?" The repulsive stinkpot of blighted flesh lowered himself to the ground and drew up his strange-jointed knees under the sloppy chin of his wide maws. After a bout of disturbing flatulence, he eagerly launched into the telling, "Six centuries past, at which hour I was yet an issue among the Kalganites, our king retained a certain Bakluni spellbinder to make war against his enemies, those Flanmen of Old Ahlissa. The lickspiddle fools did worship a lich, a pretender who didst deceive them by false-naming himself Vecna. The Bakluni dweomercrafter, Survarris by name, didst smite the Ur-Flan lich and make a prison of its own hollowed skull (this same cranium that dost hover here beside me) that he might employ its villainous devility.

"In those days, I was naught but a scrawny, pitiable orphan, much-harassed by those stronger. And I did loath all, and I did loath mine own life. Then this Survarris put

eyes upon me and did purchase me and bear me back unto his native land, as far as the West from the East. He did then apprentice me to his craft in the Zashassar where secretly he did school me in forbidden Suelish deviltry and summoner's arts. He it was that did shew me the art of fashioning an iron flask and binding up a demon therein—no small cantrip! I did later turn that trick to my advantage.

"Beyond all his pupils in dweomercraft I did excel. Survaris did grow jealous and fearful over my success, and soon did seek means by which to undo me. He didst deceive me into summoning up a wild glabrezu that it shouldst slay me, but I didst prove the quicker and made escape of its grasp. Amok it ran among the halls of the Zashassar like unto a wild boar thrashing in the potter's shop. It didst slay nobleman and scholar, slave and serf, alike. Survaris made denials for his part. He did pretend the fault all mine and did betray me unto the high court of Ekbir. For heresies they did condemn me and sentence me unto death, thus I did flee unto the waste places of Ull.

"I didst continue the craft and rose unto the ranks of the archmage, more powerful and terrible than my master. Ogre magi did obeisance before me, and I did summon up fell servants more fearsome yet. A score of years and half again did pass ere I made return unto my home among the Kalgonites of Old Ahlissa. Then I took vengeance upon mine brethren.

"I didst slay the king and all his sons with my own hands. Mine ogres and demons did seize command over his army. Terror and fear I cast upon all men, and I didst show my enemies no mercy. In misery and tyranny, I didst school them.

"On a time I did fashion an iron flask, like that of mine old master, of power sufficient to entrap a great one from among the tanar'ri. Verily! I did summon up a powerful lord of fiends and beset him with magic, trapping him within mine flask. I didst command him make war upon my foes. By his power, I didst ravage and rape all lands about me. Thus they didst name me Merciless, and I didst teach them the worth of it.

"Then came a time I did wax careless. I took upon myself the metamorphosis of a nalfeshnee fiend, forgetting the power of mine own iron flask should it be used against one such. Clever that Dark Prince in mine flask, for he didst wait until we fell into the midst of a pitched battle with mine foes. Then he did use the flask to jail me therein that he might at once find release from his prison. Hence he bore me with him back to this Abyss and made me his miserable slave. He did debase me into a lowly dretch, and in this form I did serve him many decades until, when opportunity did knock, he made me his weapon with which to smite against Orcus and Demogorgon. Ferociously I must now fight for him. I proved myself of such good use

that he hath now paid me mine reward with this fearsome form thou dost behold before thee today." With those words, the herzou stood again to his full height and spread his limbs to display his physique before the witch. He studied her face to see what impression he made upon her, but her face betrayed no inner thought. The moment passed, and his peacockish grandiosity deflated. He sank back down to sit upon the ichor-soaked soil of that forsaken world.

Tasha took courage and drew near the hideous bulk, reached out to him, and touched him with slender fingers. She stroked his pocked and oozing face and played her hands across his slime-slicked skin. "Poor, poor Tuerny," she sympathized. "An archmage made to grovel and crawl. I would that thou wast my own sire. Surely I wouldst sit upon thy lap and whisper in thine ear what secrets I do keep."

The herzou made a slushy gurgling noise in its throat, and its frog-like eyes fixed hungrily upon the lithe woman. She climbed gingerly up onto his bulking heap of stinking flesh, wrapped her slender arms around his massive head, and whispered into his ear, "If thou wilt tell thy servant the true name of that Prince of Darkness who so abuses thee, I shall free thee of his chains. I shall summon him to Oerth and bind him in that world, and Tuerny shall take his royal place. Only speak that fiend's name into mine ear."

"How sorceress, daughter of Baba Yaga though thou be? Thou art young, and thou hast not sufficient puissance to imprison a mighty tanar'ri prince."

Tasha laughed long and hard. "Oh Tuerny, Tuerny! Never fear over that! I shall find a tutor and learn the art. But first I must find entrance to the hidden treasure place of Daoud that I might take the ring, the rug, the book, the cube, and also a certain lantern set with cleverly cut gems for lenses. Tales name it a most wondrous lanthorn. By its secret ensorcellment, I may yet learn to tame the tanar'ri prince. Only grant me leave to consult the soul of Survaris and one boon more: the true name of the fiend that binds poor Tuerny here."

He handed her the black-crystal skull, hesitated only a moment, and then spoke the name of Graz'zt into her ear.

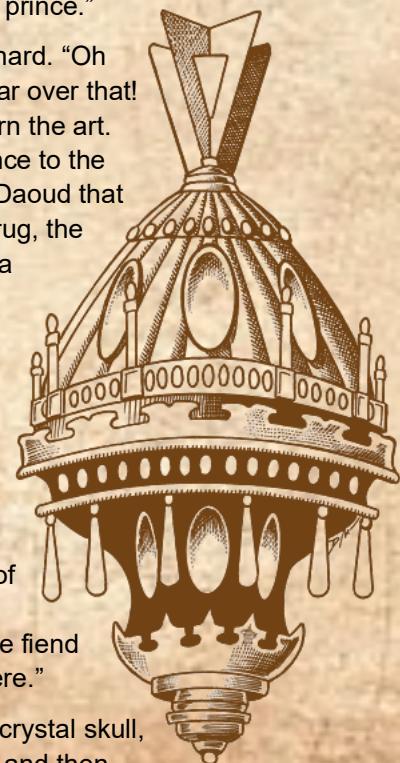


Illustration by David Martin, Courtesy of WotC



The Bane of the Death Knights

By Gary Holian of Canonfire.com

St. Benedor of The Ashen Hand, The Orb-Bearer, The Valorous One, The White Knight

It is oft remarked that in the centuries that have followed the decline and fall of the Aerdi Empire, many villains have been produced, but hardly any heroes. One of the few champions of the commonweal to emerge from that era is the figure now known as St. Benedor. While not as renowned in the Western Flanaess or the City of Greyhawk, this demigod has a cult following that spans the vast lands of the former Great Kingdom, including parts of Nyrond and the nations that comprised the original Iron League.

Benedor was the last Knight Commander of the Knight Protectors of the Great Kingdom during the tumultuous end of its so-called *Golden Age*.¹ He has spent most of the last four centuries locked in battle with the forces of darkness, most particularly the renegades who became the first Death Knights to stalk the Oerth. While that makes him a natural draw for knights, cavaliers, and paladins, he is also a figure of reverence for many common folk who labor under the yoke of tyrants or long for a return to the glory days of the Kingdom of Aerdy when it was a bastion of goodness and civilization. He is the Greyhawk god of perseverance, adroitness, gallantry, underdogs, and self-sacrifice.

EARLY HISTORY

Benedor Monlath was born in 176 CY to a family of merchants and traders in the city of Chathold. The capital of Almor at the mouth of the Harp River represented the best of Aerdi culture. It was benevolent, prosperous, and learned. Benedor's father expected him to join the family business as soon as he was able, since he showed an aptitude for organization and numbers. His mother, who was a minor lady in the House of Cranden, instead had eyes on the priesthood of Pelor and a life of scholarship and ministry for her son. She gave him his

name, which in Old Oeridian means "one who will do good things."

The young boy had his own dreams, however. He liked to carve wooden swords and play at being a knight. Benedor imagined himself joining the ranks of the heroes he read about in the illustrated scrolls he purchased at the marketplace with his spare coppers. He digested three centuries of exploits since the time of the knighthood's founding in -107 CY. He always envisioned himself in the role of the hero, fighting dragons, Ur-Flan wizards, and bestial humanoid chieftains. His favorite figure was Sir Parslin of Innspla², an early Knight Protector, who lived some 200 years prior and whose deeds set the standard for the order.

When the time came, Benedor broke both of his parent's hearts by applying to become the squire of a distant cousin named Sir Owen Knarren³ in 192 CY. After excelling at every trial put to him by the experienced knight, Benedor was finally accepted by the order. The squire soon became known for his tact and poise. The duo's most famous adventure pitted them against the Weird of the Troll Fens, a powerful hag whose reach began to threaten the early pioneers of the Pale. Sir Owen almost died during the battle as he was beset by trolls, but both knights made it out alive bearing the hag's ghastly head as proof of their victory. While the attacks stopped, they were never able to find her secret lair near the heart of the fens.

A HERO IS BORN

Benedor rose quickly within the ranks of the knighthood, drawing assignments across the Great Kingdom. Arriving too late to join the heroics of the Red Gnoll Clashes⁴ that defined the careers of his older contemporaries, like Sir Kargoth and Monduiz Dephaar, the young Sir Benedor had his share of heroic battles and daring escapades against wizards, bandits, and

1—Lasting from -21 CY to 203 CY, the Golden Age of the Knight Protectors defined their reputation and gave birth to other orders in the Flaness, such as Holy Shielding and Hart. It was the time of their greatest heroes and their most daring feats, culminating in the fall of the Death Knights.

2- The Rule(s) of Parslin are the official code of the Knight Protectors. They are still practiced to this day in almost unaltered form.

3—Elder brother of the Pholtan paladin, Oslan Knarren, who became a Death Knight.

4—The conflict with the vicious packs of red-furred gnolls of the Rakers between 182-191 CY marked a seminal period for the Knight Protectors. Many atrocities were committed and the Rule of Parslin was sometimes ignored. Recent reports (591 CY) suggest a return of the red gnolls, as some have been spotted in Spinecastle, but this remains unconfirmed.

blackguards alike. Most notably he led a small party that slayed the great green dragon of the Gamboge Forest, *Celadiorex Rampant*. Then he defeated the plot of Bort'Hamuz⁵, the Bugbear Lord of the Rakers. However, one incident was the most defining in his young career, and it had little to do with the depredations of monsters.

In 199 CY, a breakaway group of young knights on the southern verges of the Viceroyalty of Nyrond formed a brief rebellion in the Anodan Hills. They called themselves the Knights of Nehron, after an Oeridian tribe defeated by the Aerdi centuries ago⁶. They captured three castles and were threatening the city of Wragby with encirclement.

Sir Benedor's commander had been slain in a skirmish with the renegade knights a few days prior and he was left in sole command. In order to save his men and shorten what would be an enervating siege, the well-read Sir Benedor invoked an ancient Nehron battle rite that he recalled. It required single combat between champions. Too embarrassed to deny their own cultural heritage, especially to an outsider, the leader of the rebels was forced to accept. In the ensuing duel, Sir Benedor was twice knocked to the ground and nearly slain, but was able to rise finally and claim the day.

In the aftermath, Sir Benedor granted parole to all of the Knights of Nehron though it would have been his right to imprison them and strip them of their honors and possessions. But better than anyone alive, he knew the Rules of Parslin, especially their spirit. He allowed the knights to keep their arms if they individually swore an oath to the Great Kingdom and promised to never again take up arms against the Malachite Throne. He gained the respect of knights on both sides of the conflict that day and the Viceroy at Rel Mord awarded him his highest honor. Even the royal court at Rauxes took note of his name.

A FATEFUL DUEL

Sir Benedor's exploits and the manner in which he conducted himself, impressed many of his peers. Despite his youth, in 203 CY Benedor was the surprising choice of the Council Gallant as the next Knight Commander of the Order. In doing so, they passed over numerous more experienced candidates. However, most of the senior

knights felt he best represented the tenets of the order. He combined both honor and wisdom that was rare in one so young.

No one was more shocked than Sir Benedor, save perhaps Lord Kargoth himself, the greatest warrior of the age. Sir Benedor attempted to decline the honor, but was rebuffed. His mentor, Sir Owen, told him that he was a paragon, likely touched by Johydee herself. After much cajoling, he reluctantly accepted the post.

As has been recounted elsewhere⁷ Lord Kargoth received this news poorly and challenged the young knight to a duel. Sir Benedor was physically outmatched, but he remembered one of the Rules of Parslin, repeating it over and over in his head, *to the challenged goes the draw*, as he parried away the stronger knight's wild thrusts and avoided his strongest attacks. When St. Benedor was declared the winner, he genuinely felt sorry for Lord Kargoth, recognizing the disappointment in the elder knight's eyes. He extended a hand of friendship, but it was haughtily rebuffed. Little did Sir Benedor know that this day set in motion events that would affect his destiny and that of the Great Kingdom.

THE TRAITORS REVEALED

Months later, the entire kingdom was shocked by word that Lord Kargoth and his allies had attacked the Temple of Lothan outside of Rel Deven. How could a paladin act with such dishonor, they wondered. But panic soon gripped the realm, when news broke of the Abyssal horror that had also been unleashed⁸. Nothing like it had been seen before or since. Suddenly Lord Kargoth became a secondary concern.

Sir Benedor and a small group of knights who were on their way to Chathold departed immediately for the small temple. The monstrous horror had already made it into the countryside, so Benedor decided to investigate the smoking ruins before pursuing the beast in earnest.

He knew this place from his youth. Benedor had visited it many times with his mother. It was an ancient temple and few made the journey to it even then⁹. He recalled a lesson he had learned from his mother on one of those occasions. The figure most men call Pelor is the same as *Sol Incarnate*, the loftiest figure from ancient

5—Assumed power in the vacuum created by the Red Gnolls defeat.

6—The Battle of a Fortnight's Length between the Nehron (or the Nyrondi as the Aerdi called them) and Aerdi gave birth to the Great Kingdom in -110 CY, three years before the founding of the Knight Protectors.

7—Dragon Magazine 290 p100-104

8—Arendagrost, Maw of the Abyss. Detailed in Dungeon Magazine #150.

9—The Temple of Lothan has never been rebuilt, nor has its ruins or extensive dungeons explored. Many creatures, both good and evil are attracted to the site and will sometimes clash there.

Aerdi lore. Sir Benedor remembered an old prayer for Sol, reciting it for protection before entering the defiled temple.

Within the inner sanctum, he found the charred bodies of the former Knight Protectors who had flocked to Lord Kargoth's banner. When they began to rise as Death Knights he knew his life was in extreme peril, so he took the Orb of Sol from its pedestal and said another quick prayer to Pelor to beg his indulgence. The sphere was hot to the touch, so he dropped it into a bag and escaped from the ruin with his life.

Sir Benedor pursued the horror to the east. Remembering the tale of Sir Lasimon the Martyr, he rallied the Knight Protectors at Carnifand¹⁰ to maximize their effectiveness. As their forebears once did, the knights would put their lives on the line for king and country. But the beast from the Abyss was unlike anything most of them had ever faced. They wounded it time and again, but nothing would bring it down.

Many knights died that day, as well as members of the royal family. As the situation became desperate, Sir Benedor recalled a tale from his youth in which an ancient Aerdi hero used the Orb of Sol to defeat a pack of daemons that were threatening his village.

Without fanfare, he pulled the Orb from his bag and held it aloft. He could immediately feel the pain from the heat it produced. It began to glow, but did little else. He winced, then dodged another one of Arendagrost's tentacles. As he studied the Orb again, he saw a word he recognized. It was from one of his mother's prayers. He repeated the prayer aloud. Suddenly, fiery beams of light were loosed from the Orb and struck the monstrosity.

Sir Benedor was thrown backwards and knocked out. Many of the horror's limbs were turned to ash and a big, gaping hole was burned through its chest. Every warrior, mage, and cleric left alive saw their opportunity to strike. The beast was finally dispatched.

The Fraternal Clash

After the costly victory at Carnifand, Sir Benedor was badly injured. Use of the Orb had debilitating effects, as he was temporarily blinded in both eyes and his left palm was badly burned. The Knight Commander was carried to Morshaldin Castle to recuperate and discuss a plan of action with other Knight Protectors.

The Council Gallant was further depleted as many

of its most prestigious members were killed in clashes with the Death Knights. The villains had begun to rampage across the land of Aerdy, drawing noble knights into reckless pursuits and duels. Most fell. The dead included Sir Benedor's mentor, Sir Owen Knarren. On at least two occasions, knights swore they had killed one of the blackguards, only to discover that he was back from the dead months later. Were they immortal?

Anger filled the survivors. The knights swore vengeance on the traitors. Sir Benedor agreed, but cautioned against pursuing them without a plan. The Knight Protectors could easily become the quarry instead of the hunters so they chose to eschew tradition and they began to patrol in larger groups of 6 or more knights. They would be accompanied by squires and their retinues supplemented by mages or clerics from the royal academies and churches.

Sir Benedor and the Knight Protectors managed to curtail the threat. The Death Knights were no longer seen as frequently. In 209 CY, however, Benedor was forced to duel two Death Knights simultaneously, as the brothers Maeril and Farian of Lirtham were threatening the city of Delaric. While his men battled their makeshift army, Sir Benedor took on the Death Knights himself. The entire fight had Sir Benedor off balance and in defense of his life. Despite the risks, he unleashed the powers of the Orb once again, this time destroying the Death Knight Sir Farian. Only his smoking skull remained which was claimed by his brother who stalked off in defeat. Sir Benedor required a month of bed rest.

The Death Knights soon learned of this event and were spooked by it. They learned they could taste death and that they were not completely beyond its grasp. Their appetite for interfering in the affairs of the realm fell dramatically. Their leader, Lord Kargoth had not been seen for many years. Rumors suggested he was no longer on Oerth, but in the company of his master in the Abyss.

Sir Benedor continued to work tirelessly against the plots of the Death Knights. In 247 CY, in one of his last public acts, Sir Benedor directed siege engines to the site of Castle Fharlanst and had its walls reduced to rubble¹¹.

Retirement

In 249 CY, at the age of 73, Sir Benedor announced his retirement as Knight Commander to little fanfare. He received no rewards, titles or honors from the Overking

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over the course of his life. Many even blamed him for the strife caused by the Death Knights. The reconstituted Council Gallant chose his successor in a quiet ceremony at their headquarters a few months later. Gone were the days when such events were held at the royal palace and the stuff of great pomp and circumstance. The Overking did not even attend.

Benedor would be succeeded by a line of well meaning and heroic knights. The men and women at Morshaldin Castle would inherit the thankless task of managing the decline of the once Great Kingdom, as its provinces broke apart and its Overkings grew increasingly indolent and dissolute.

Sir Benedor withdrew from public life. The knight had no castle to call home, having never had the time or money to build a stronghold of his own. He went north and some say he spent time in Spinecastle and Ratik, before disappearing entirely. Most presumed him dead or far into his dotage.

MIRACULOUS RETURN

In 305 CY, following the sudden and mysterious death of Overking Earhart III, a plot emerged involving the Death Knights, Prince Myral of Rax and his ally Lord Khayven. It would see them raise an army northwest of Dustbridge, take that city, and march on the capital to claim the throne.

The depleted and inexperienced Knight Protectors of the time attempted to organize a makeshift defense, but the army was disorganized, undermanned, and surely destined to defeat. The great Houses of Aerdy were slow to send reinforcements, save Garasteth, who sent a significant force from the southeast. The knights in command were brave, so they dutifully took the field to await their fate.

As the Death Knight army approached, its brash, unruly packs of mercenaries, brigands, and orcs could be heard for miles. They easily outnumbered the Knight Protectors and their men by three or four times. Many of the defenders began to pray to whatever powers they felt most close.

As the armies closed to within a thousand yards of each other, a figure emerged from the woods to the west. It was a man riding a grey horse, dressed in the livery of a knight, if perhaps a few decades out of fashion. He turned towards the lines of the Knight Protectors and when he got to within a few yards, he rode past the first line more slowly, as if inspecting the troops. The young commanders of the army were astonished, but did nothing to interrupt him.

He turned back towards the center of the line,

stopped, and removed his helm. No one reacted. No one in this army was old enough to have seen Sir Benedor at his last appearance or know his face. Yet, he looked scarcely a day older than the day of his retirement. Benedor seemed to realize that he was unrecognized and took a moment to offer some words, speaking as loudly as he could.

"My name is Benedor of Chathold! I've come to help my brothers- and sisters-at-arms defeat this army of rabble! Aerdi, protect your kingdom!" A murmur went up amongst the troops. Some men appeared to stiffen their spines and grow two inches taller. Among others, there seemed to be some confusion and indecision.

Benedor sensed this quickly and reluctantly tugged the glove from his left hand and held his outstretched palm aloft. Those closest by could see it was grey and charred. At first there was nothing. Then, moments later, a slight shimmer appeared on its surface. A light seemed to emerge from his palm and it began to glow. It grew stronger and stronger, until it threatened to blind those nearby. The defenders began to shout their astonishment. Small groups of men began to chant.

Benedor continued, "We are Aerdi! We are born of the Sun!" he shouted anew. "We do not cower from darkness! We drive it out! I've killed one of these bastards already and if needed, I shall do so again!" He turned and readied himself to lead the charge against the enemy lines, drawing a massive sunblade in his sword hand, while holding his glowing hand still outstretched.

At this point, the seniormost knights of the army had already readied their lances from horseback or drawn their swords and shields on foot. They needed no more evidence. The bloody Battle of Stringen had begun.

News of the surprising victory that day spread quickly, but more importantly, news of the return of Sir Benedor. Some began to call him, St. Benedor. Many were certain that this miraculous return was evidence that he was blessed by the goddess, Johydee, and ultimately by *Sol Incarnate*, himself. Among many he gained the epithet "the Ashen Hand".

THE LONG HUNT

Humiliated by their defeat, the Death Knights vowed their revenge. Thus began an era that lasted almost two hundred years. Most of the Death Knights, with notable exceptions, hunted for St. Benedor, while the Ashen Hand and his allies in turn, hounded and foiled their plots. And so it would go for decade after decade.

Overking Portillan, generally regarded as the last effective Overking, provided resources and support for

rebuilding the Knight Protectors in 346 CY, one of his first official acts. He received St. Benedor at the royal palace of Rauxes, belatedly thanking him for his service. This pleased many around the kingdom who saw division and chaos creeping around the verges of the realm.

The order saw a brief flowering and was able to recruit a strong class of knights who would protect the realm for many years to come. Most of these men and women revered St. Benedor as the patron of the order.

Jealous of St. Benedor's elevation to sainthood, Lord Kargoth demanded the same from his master. Demogorgon, the Sibilant Beast, was amused and so Kargoth became one of the few Champions of Evil, the twisted mirror image of all that is good and right.

A BLACKENED THRONE

In 437 CY, the Great Kingdom was torn by schism as it appeared Overking Nalif of the House of Rax was assassinated and the scion of the House of Naelax, Ivid, tried to assert a claim to the Malachite Throne.

While St. Benedor was never personally involved in these affairs, people on all sides invoked his name repeatedly. One faction even wanted the saint to appear in Rauxes to decide who would be the next Overking, but he did not do so.

The Knight Protectors sided with the Rax claim, which would mean the Herzog of the South Province should assume the Malachite Throne. They reasoned that Ivid's advancement through assassination could never be tolerated, so they supported the southern faction, despite its incompetence. However, the other Celestial Houses could not agree, bringing on years of civil war that ended in 446 CY with the victory of Ivid's northern faction.

The Knight Protectors would reap his revenge.

The order was expelled from Morshaldin Castle, their headquarters for over 500 years. Many were arrested on trumped up charges of treason. The wiser and more prescient among them fled the heartlands, primarily to Almor, Bone March, Ratik, and the Iron League where they could be somewhat safe from the clutches of the Mad Overking. The close relationship between the Knight Protectors and the Malachite Throne was broken.

St. Benedor came to Spinecastle in 452 CY and

was received by Marquis Gerrold, a prominent member of the much reduced Council Gallant. They agreed that the order would be headquartered at the impregnable Spinekeep from that day forward. Most of the surviving possessions and treasures of the order were transferred there.

This news was met by derision in the North Province who came to see their cousins as enemies. This was not true of the Imperial Highlanders, who still saw the Knight Protectors as brethren and both sides secretly cooperated on defensive matters involving the humanoids of the Rakers and barbarian raids. Elsewhere, old adversaries began to stir.

GUEST OF CASTLE GREYHAWK

In 504 CY, after many furtive attempts, St. Benedor was tracked to the Gull Cliffs by no less than five of the Death Knights, all on horseback¹², including Monduiz Dephaar, Lorana Kath, Luren the Boar, Maeril of Naelax, and Lord Khayven. The villains were led by St. Kargoth and included an army of fiends at their disposal. This was no ordinary pursuit, it was a mission of annihilation.

St. Benedor sensed the danger and could even sometimes hear their distant taunts. Twice he ran into patrols and was forced into improvised clashes, which he won, but they began to take an increasing toll. He picked his way through the hills on foot in the hopes of finding an escape. However, stalking demons were approaching his position from all sides. Eventually he discovered a sheltered cave and began to consider a defense. For once, he thought, he wouldn't mind sharing St. Bane's grim company¹³.

His reminiscence was soon disturbed. "Deep in thought?" came a voice from the mouth of the cave a few moments later. St. Benedor drew his sword and stood instantly to face his intruder. "You won't need that, at least not yet," said the man with a laugh as he stepped closer into the light. St. Benedor could sense immediately that this was a mortal, albeit an odd one. He could detect no evil, but the man's grin still gave him no comfort. He was garbed in blue and silver robes and looked like a balding old mage, albeit more like the ones that perform parlor tricks for children, than cast fearsome spells at strangers.

"What do you want of me?" asked the saint. "You

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12—This was a harass of fiendish nightmares (max HP) sent by Demogorgon himself from his personal stables on the Abyss.

13—The two saints were known to share each other's company for a time in the 400s, stalking evil on this and other planes of existence.

are in great peril, stranger," he continued.

"I know, isn't it fun?" the mage replied, giggling. St. Benedor frowned. The mage's humor at this fraught hour was irritating.

"Alright, down to business I guess." The mage's demeanor changed instantly. "So, I have good news. My master tells me that by sundown tomorrow you will be elevated to the ranks of the Powers That Be! Congratulations!"

The mage clapped his hands together as the knight, for once in his life, seemed taken aback. "How could you know this?" inquired St. Benedor, this time truly astonished.

"I know, trust me I know. Have you felt the pain? The weakness? The transformation has begun. The fever of apotheosis, some call it. I know it, good knight. Just like I know that you will be dead before the dawn. Yours will be the shortest brush with divinity since....St. Carmichael? No? Well, ever!"

"I do not believe you," interrupted St. Benedor.

"Of course you do, you are a poor liar, Valorous One! But those that are howling outside, they have your scent and they will tear you apart and devour the flesh long before its transformation is complete. There will be nothing left to bury." The mage let the words hang in the air for a moment before smiling profusely again. "However, I have a proposition..."

Minutes later, St. Benedor was spirited away from the cave without much ado. He was forced to leave behind many of his belongings. They have never been found¹⁴.

RE-EMERGENCE

St. Benedor was released from Castle Greyhawk in 586 CY. According to reports, he traveled to the Vale of Avesta to meet with his old friend Seragrimm as well as to recuperate and reacquaint himself with the world since his confinement.

His discovery of the fall of the Bone March in 563 CY and the fate of Spinecastle and the Knight Protectors headquartered there was extremely disheartening as he was powerless to prevent it. He was disgusted by the advance of evil on many fronts and the total fracturing of the Kingdom of Aerdy. When he was first told of them, he thought the Greyhawk Wars were the cruel joke of one of his old copper-a-scroll writers.

Many surviving members of the order have taken

the return of St. Benedor as a sign that now is the time to strike, to restore the old order, and the fortunes of the Great Kingdom.

APPEARANCE

St. Benedor takes no guises and appears as a mature man of indeterminate years. He seems far younger than his true age. However, his once healthy and ruddy complexion has turned slightly ashy and colorless, as though he has stood too close to the campfire as it was doused.

The demigod has brown hair streaked with bits of grey. His once keen and friendly hazel eyes are now gone, replaced by grey orbs that manage to see, but have lost all their color and life. He will sometimes cover them with a blindfold in the company of mortals. He is lithe and not overly muscular. He dons a breastplate that is painted in white, usually worn with a pale tunic, and he rarely carries a shield. However, he always has a sword at his side and otherwise outfits himself in all the ways befitting a knight.

Some find his appearance eerie, almost ghostly, but it's not intentional. The demigod retains his penetrating intellect and a grim sense of humor. He has natural leadership qualities and an almost otherworldly ability to inspire men. His favorite pastime was to regale the young squires with tales of yore, but such opportunities are increasingly few.

ABILITIES (1st Edition)

ARMOR CLASS: -5 (+4 plate armor)

MOVE: 21"

HIT POINTS: 158

NO. OF ATTACKS: 3

DAMAGE/ATTACK: By weapon type +1

SPECIAL ATTACKS: See below

SPECIAL DEFENSES: +1 weapon to hit

MAGIC RESISTANCE: 50%

SIZE: M (6' tall)

ALIGNMENT: NG

WORSHIPPERS' ALIGNMENT: LG, LN, NG, CG

SYMBOL: Golden Orb

PLANE: Oerth (PMP)

CLERIC/DRUID: 10th level cleric

FIGHTER: 16th level fighter / 12th level paladin

MAGIC-USER/ILLUSIONIST: Nil

THIEF/ASSASSIN: Nil

14—If discovered, these items might include relics of importance to the Knight Protectors or followers of the cult of St. Benedor that could prove valuable.

MONK/BARD: Nil

PSIONIC ABILITY: II

Attack/Defense Modes: All/all

S: 17 **I:** 18 **W:** 22 **D:** 15 **C:** 20 **CH:** 18

St. Benedor's favorite weapon is the bastard sword. He has used numerous magical versions over the years, but his preferred one is now a +5 sunblade named Menestar, which he has carried for over 200 years.

Menestar is an intelligent weapon containing the spirit of a planetar who fell in battle against the forces of darkness but was given a second chance within the confines of this celestially-forged blade. In fact, the angelic being was slain by St. Kargoth, but the Ashen Hand is unaware of this. As Benedor is usually unaccompanied, it is Menestar's special purpose to watch over the god's back and alert him to dangers. He also has encyclopedic knowledge of the denizens of the outer planes and can be an annoying chatterbox. The blade is useless in the hands of any other.

St. Benedor rarely carries the Orb of Sol on his person since his elevation to godhood. It was lost to him for a great time. It is as if the relic was no longer meant for his ken¹⁵. Its main purpose remains to help mortals. However, his prolonged exposure to the relic and his elevation to godhood has allowed him to retain certain powers.

St. Benedor is able to create a region of continual light of up to 40 ft radius. It is blinding to all mortals caught within it, save for the Ashen Hand himself.

St. Benedor can:

Turn Undead as a 20th level cleric (unlimited)

Holy Word as a 20th level cleric (1/day)

Power Words (all) as a 20th level cleric (1/day/word)

Miracle (1/week)

St. Benedor lacks the power to travel the planes by innate magic and must do so through portals or other means. He has no known soul object, but it is thought his soul might have become entangled with the Orb that he carried for so long, requiring the destruction of both.

the whiteguard

There are few figures in the multiverse that make both demons and devils quake, that bid the hounds of Hades to howl, and the slaadi of Limbo to moan in disgust. One

such collection of individuals is known simply as the Whiteguard. It was founded by a legendary hero known as Hainard¹⁶. This alliance of powerful beings, that includes Quasi-deities, Saints, Demigods and Celestials is known for its reach far beyond the confines of Oerth.

Following his rise to sainthood, Benedor was invited to be a member of the group. As a demigod, he is now its most powerful member. St. Bane and Seragrimm the Just are two other known members of the order from Oerth. They are currently trying to recruit a young saint named, Eleador, but he has not yet made a decision. The exact roster is kept a necessary secret and it is not unusual for members to stand in each other's stead to keep their enemies off base.

The most famous instance of this occurred when St. Kargoth expected to corner St. Benedor on a rocky promontory in the Outlands, but instead was faced with Hainard the White who had created a false trail for the villain to follow. St. Kargoth was caught off guard for once, unaware of the powers of this strange warrior, but engaged him ruthlessly, nonetheless. The ensuing battle was epic and from a distance drew a large crowd of outsiders of all dispositions and creeds.

St. Kargoth was wielding his favorite blade, Gorgorin the Shatterer which had the blood of so many Knight Protectors coat its dark surface. Hainard raised an equally impressive piece of steel known as Brimir which was forged by a storm giant. As battle was joined, sparks and flames lit up the air, until finally Hainard knocked the Shatterer from Kargoth's grasp and it fell from the promontory into the mists below¹⁷. Kargoth spat as he retreated, while the bellowing laughter of Hainard seemed to echo from one end of the Outlands to the other.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER POWERS

While not certain, most suspect that it was the Sun-God, Pelor, that elevated St. Benedor first to sainthood, then to godhood. Indeed, the two faiths maintain the closest of relations to the current day. Followers of both gods can expect shelter and succor from the other at any time.

St. Benedor maintains friendly relations with the Church of Heironeous and to a lesser extent other good faiths such as St. Cuthbert, Pholtus, and Rao.

While there was no initial enmity between Benedor

15—Rumors place the current location of the Orb in the Vale of Avesta described in Oerth Journal #33.

16—Hainard's origins are a tale for another time.

17—Witnesses claim that a pair of black hands were seen picking up the sword and a figure racing away from the scene with the sword at breakneck speed.

and the Church of Hextor, that is no longer true. St. Benedor has contended too often with the plots of some Death Knights who are dedicated to the Lord of Hate and Discord that he has earned their wrath.

Mayaheine is a relatively new power, she arrived in the Flanaess only some 20 winters ago, but her following has been growing quickly and filling in the gap for a hero in the West. Her portfolio is similar to the White Knight and followers should be on relatively friendly terms with those of St. Benedor, but thus far the interactions have been few.

St. Benedor is the sworn foe of all Fiends and the denizens of the lower planes but has special enmity for Demogorgon and his braying retinue.

FOLLOWERS

Followers of the Ashen Hand often brand themselves to show their willingness to suffer as their lord did. Many members of his cult mortify their shield hand, usually by grasping an iron ball heated in a flame until they can no longer tolerate the pain. This results in a distinctive stigma in the palm. Many Knight Protectors will bear this mark.

In some parts of the Great Kingdom, bearing that mark means a sentence of painful death. In others, it opens many doors, including to the highest halls. Most places are somewhere in between.

What few realize is that when the ritual is properly performed and the devotion heartfelt, a small boon is awarded to the branded person that remains as long as they continue to follow their oaths. The exact benefit is determined each day and cannot be chosen (d100):

01-30:	+1 to hit vs evil 1/day
31-50:	+1 to saving throws vs evil sources 1/day
51-70:	Detect evil 1/day
71-85:	Hand will shine as a <i>light</i> spell 1/day
86-99:	1 HP deducted from an attack 1/day
100:	Display the brand and turn undead 1/day

the ORB OF SOL

According to legend, the origins of this ancient artifact predate the Great Migrations of prehistory. That the Orb was carried across the Flanaess by the Aerdi tribes a millennium ago is a certainty, for there are many contemporaneous accounts of its use in the halfway lands by such migrations-era luminaries as Orelon the Wan and the much revered high-priest Lothan.

Of the apocryphal period before the migrations, only fragments of narrative exist. It is believed that the Orb was a gift from the Gods to the helio-theocratic Oeridian

peoples of central Oerik to inspire their defense against predatory neighboring tribes who worshipped daemons and other monstrous fiends.

Many later legends connect its use to the priestess Johydee who reportedly used the powers of the Orb against the depraved enemies of the Aerdi tribes while they were scrambling to escape the all-engulfing wars of the Suel and Baklunish in the Far West. It was carried in battle against dark Ur-Flan necromancers and Suel Wizards alike before the founding of the Great Kingdom.

Over the centuries, its appearances became increasingly rare and its truth passed into legend. It has become such a powerful symbol of Aerdi unity that few realize today that it was an actual object, its true value and purpose now lost to the mists.

Its physical description is fairly uncomplicated, though remarkable in its own way. It is a perfect sphere of golden metal (approximately 5 inches in diameter) inlaid with subtle runes throughout its entire surface. Careful study of the runes reveals the markings to be Holy Words written in dozens of languages, including Ancient Suel, Old Oeridian, and the tongue of the Olman. The majority of these runes are so obscure as to be utterly lost to translation. Some scholars have posited its origins as perhaps Pelorian. Others think it's beyond the creation of any one god.

The orb emits a soft yellow glow at rest but shines fiercely when its powers are activated. It is depicted in this latter state in the heraldry of the kingdom, usually with undulating rays of power. The Orb of Sol is incredibly light, weighing only a little more than 5 pounds, leading many to suspect that it is hollow or contains some hidden compartment. Over the ages, however, no breach has ever been found on its surface.

Centuries of neglect by Aerdi rulers allowed the Orb to fall out of the public consciousness. Pagan beliefs in an all-powerful Sun Power gave way to a polytheism of more closely involved, practical, urban and societal gods. By the time of the creation of the Great Kingdom, the Orb of Sol had little more than symbolic value.

In -24 CY, the Court Mage Schandor had the Orb secretly transported out of Rauxes to a resting place at the Temple of Lothan near Rel Deven which was then under the protection of House Cranden. There it remained under token watch for centuries until it was recovered by St. Benedor in 203 CY.

The reported powers of the Orb work at all times, but to activate its special abilities requires the knowledge to decipher its runes as well as great wisdom (equal to or greater than 16). The Orb will instantly scald any inherently evil being in direct contact with the sphere (to

the tune of 1d6+6 damage per round). It is often hot to the touch, regardless, and can be difficult to hold for long. Some of the known and reputed powers of the Orb of Sol include:

- *Continuous Light 5' radius (permanent).*
- *Protection from Evil 10' radius (permanent).*
- *Negative Energy Protection (permanent).*
- *Turn Undead as a 20th level priest.*
- *Holy Aura as a 20th level priest.*
- *Holy Word as a 20th level priest.*

- *Power Words (all) as a 20th level priest.*
- *Prismatic Spray (Golden) 60 points of positive energy damage (double against undead).*
- *Miracle as a 20th level priest.*

Most are activated through the invocation of combinations of the holy words written on the sphere. According to the legends, prolonged exposure to the Orb can have many deleterious effects, such as random aging, powerful geas, and loss of sight.



OMNIPOTENT VIEW: FORGING OF A MAN

Bleredd tests a Blacksmith's Mettle

By Richard DiIoia, (aka Longetalos)

The blacksmith was covered in sweat from the day's labor. A dozen horseshoes and a few bags of nails lay scattered nearby. The blacksmith looked up from the forge and sighed. His muscles ached, he was sticky, and he was running low on fuel for the fire. He casually tossed his hammer onto the workbench nearby, scattering a few tools as it slid by. The hammer struck the stone wall behind the bench with a loud bang, followed by another a few seconds later when a pair of tongs fell off a peg on the wall due to the vibration. Without a backwards glance, the blacksmith walked towards the bucket of water in the corner. He was about to pour the cool water over his face when someone rang the bell at the counter in the front of the shop.

"Can't the idiots tell by the lack of hammering noise that I'm closed for the day?" The blacksmith muttered to himself. "It's probably one of the villagers with another broken scythe. After years of scratching the earth, you'd think they'd learn to avoid the rocks in their fields. Bah, maybe they'll go away."

The blacksmith's hopes were dashed a few moments later when the bell was rung again, more insistently than before. "By Ralishaz's dice, can't a man have a moment's peace!" He cursed as he stormed his way towards the adjacent shop. Standing at the counter, inspecting the forgings, was a young man wearing gray travelling robes cinched with a black belt.

"Good evening Carsin, I am Brother Hacien."

"Look, I already gave alms to Father Gellord of St-Cuthbert. Now, I don't know who gave you my name and said I'd give you alms but you can march on back to him and tell him to give you the alms himself." Carsin said with

his face slowly turning red in anger.

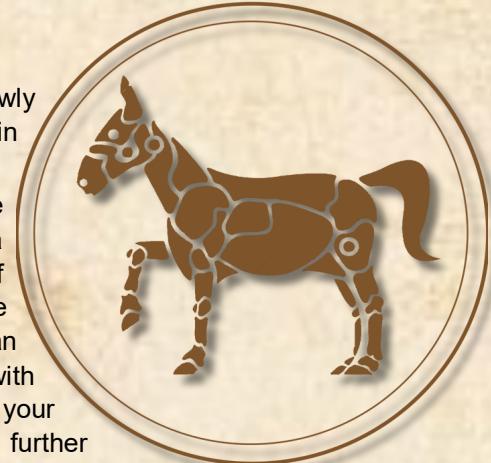
"I am not here for alms. I am a follower of Bleredd and came to seek an apprenticeship with you. I have seen your work and wish to further my communion with Bleredd through what you can teach me." Brother Hacien made this request in a humble voice.

Taken aback in surprise, Carsin was at a loss for words. He had not prayed to Bleredd in a long time, ever since his work had become a routine, unpleasant task. Carsin did not want an apprentice. The last few he had were troublesome and barely did an honest day's work. Plus, they interfered in his life and were constantly bothering him with useless questions. Then again, saying no to a follower of Bleredd could cause him trouble with his guild. He definitely didn't want that.

"Fine, you can be my apprentice. You can have the spare room. I'll see you at the forge at immediately after dawn."

The next morning, as Carsin entered the forge, he found the monk awake and eager to begin his day of work. "You're late, I told you to be here at before dawn. Let's get started before you waste more time."

"But...you said...fine, what would you like me to do this fine morning?" asked Hacien.



"We need more fuel for the forge. The coal is out back. Then you need to prepare the ore. After that...." Carsin droned on the list of daily tasks for the apprentice to do.

A few back-breaking months later, Brother Hacien had still not quit his apprenticeship. Both master and apprentice were sitting down for supper and discussing the next day's work.

"We have a busy day tomorrow. Might have to work late," stated Carsin.

"No problem. I will pray to Bleredd to grant us light if we work past dark," responded Hacien.

"Guess that would be fine. Save us some money on lantern oil," Carsin said as he scooped a spoonful of beans to his mouth.

"Celestian rides his chariot tonight. Only happens once every 30 years. Will you be joining me to watch?" asked Hacien.

"Not much point. It's not like he is interested in a blacksmith," grunted Carsin.

"True, but sometimes Bleredd strikes with his hammer at the chariot as it flies by. If he connects, he knocks loose some pieces to fall to the ground for us to collect. With the metals fallen we can forge great works," said Hacien with enthusiasm.

Carsin looked at his apprentice's eager face and paused. The boy was a hard worker and it couldn't hurt to make him happy once in a while. "Might be I'll join you."

That night, Hacien found himself a clearing on the outskirts of the village to watch the sky. Hacien enjoyed the silence of the night. It was a nice counter to the noisy day working in a forge. A few minutes later, Carsin joined him. "Couldn't sleep. The neighbor's dogs were barking."

"Yes, I thought I heard them," smiled Hacien.

"I brought some ale. Might as well make something worthwhile of the evening," said Carsin as he uncorked a flask.

"In all the months I worked here, you never asked me why I came all this way to apprentice with you," asked Hacien.

"Bleredd works in strange ways. Not my place to question the decisions of his chosen," said Carsin.

"It was a spear I saw displayed in a hall of a lord a few kilometers south of the monastery. The workmanship was fabulous, and I knew that I had to learn from the man who created it. It took me over a year to find you," said Hacien.

"Was a long time ago," said Carsin.

"Why did you become a simple blacksmith working on horseshoes and nails? Bleredd gifted you with the ability to make wondrous works!" exclaimed Hacien.

A dark cloud covered Carsin's face as he looked at Hacien. "Don't ever believe that having great skill is a blessing. I was dedicated to my art. Lords from kilometers around would flock to my forge to peruse my wares. They

would pay anything I wanted for an item specially crafted for them. Then the dark times came. The great wars that shook the lands. No longer was I allowed to forge to my pleasure. Only weapons of war would the lords allow me to make. My gift turned into my curse. I grew death in my forge. I felt it in my bones and soul. The weapons I made were not works of art. They were cold and harsh, longing for destruction. Until one day it went away."

"It went away? What went away?" asked Hacien.

"The curse, my gift. My skill with metals. I can no longer make anything more complicated than a horseshoe," sighed Carsin.

"But ... that's impossible! How can you unlearn something? Were you cursed by a wizard or a creature of darkness?" stammered Hacien.

"Wish I knew. At first, the lords would not believe me either. They beat me senseless and forced me to forge weapons. Oh, I tried to forge more weapons, but the metal became brittle and shattered. Much like my skill. The lords cast me out into the wilderness, penniless and hungry. Over time, I made my way here - to the ends of the world," said Carsin in a flat tone.

"Have you tried again since you came here?" asked Hacien.

"Yes, once, a few years ago - I failed. I still have the knowledge, but my hands won't listen. They won't do what I tell them to," said Carsin.

"So that is why you have been teaching me but not working at the forge yourself! And that is why I am here!" exclaimed Hacien.

"What? What are you here for?" asked Carsin confused.

"I am here to teach you to forge again. This is the task that Bleredd set forth for me. I must not only learn to forge metals, but I must also learn to re-forged your spirit. Bleredd will work his will through me to give you back your gift," stated Hacien.

Carsin burst out laughing.

"What's so funny?" asked Hacien.

"From apprentice to all wise monk in but a few moments. Oh, what a magical night this is," said Carsin with a smile.

Hacien grunted in reply. "Do you have any better plans for the next few months?"

At that exact moment, Celestian's chariot blazoned its way across the sky, leaving behind it a trail of lights that slowly cascaded their way towards Oerth.

A short time after the chariot passed out of sight, Carsin stood up. Turning to his companion, Carsin smiled and said, "Bleredd works in strange ways. Not my place to question the decisions of his chosen. I'll meet you in the forge just after dawn, Brother Hacien."



INAUGURATION OF AN APPRENTICE

A Trainee in the Scarlet Brotherhood tests his mettle

By Robert M. Guy II

With a tight economy of movement taught by Master Tyrum, Renho tilted his head slightly to his left avoiding the punch thrown by Pramas. Unfortunately, Renho was not quick enough to overcome the pace Pramas had established, and it was only a matter of time before Pramas would land a blow that would end the fight unless Renho tried something unorthodox to bring the combat rhythm to his favor. Pramas threw three quick consecutive punches, Renho changed his focus from dodging the blows to blocking them.

"You're slowing, *Keldeen*," Pramas taunted, calling Renho by his nickname. It was a name he hated and had been given to him due to the variation in the coloration of his eyes; one being the color of emerald and the other reminiscent of sparkling sapphire. Both eye colors represented the purity of the Suel race but having different colored eyes was an anomaly and anomalies were frowned upon in Suel society. Conformity was the rule, and through conformity came harmony. *Keldeen* is the ancient Suel word for *mismatch*.

Renho decided he would allow Pramas to strike him in the body to set up a reverse elbow strike he had been secretly practicing. The first strike landed and Renho felt his ribs crack, the second strike broke his ribs and the third was intercepted by Renho's upward rising knee, landing in such a way as to break Pramas' wrist. Before Pramas could retract his ruined hand, Renho swung his weight forward and to his left, the pain in his ribs almost making him retch, but he spun his right arm behind him in such a way as to strike Pramas in the face with a backward spinning elbow. The move was deceptive and the backward spin increased the velocity of the strike greatly. The sound of Pramas' breaking jaw echoed in the combat circle. Unconscious, Pramas fell unceremoniously to the ground, motionless, his body lying in an awkward position.

Although he technically won the combat session, allowing Pramas to land blows would earn Renho chastisement from Master Tyrum. Mercy was not a trait known by members of the Scarlet Brotherhood, and Master Tyrum epitomized the attitudes and discipline espoused by the Ministry of Purity.

As the thrall healers tended to Pramas, Renho assessed the damage done to his ribs. Two were indeed broken, they would mend but the pain would linger for some time. "Turn your pain into experience," Master Tyrum had imparted often in his training session.

As was tradition, Renho saluted the still unconscious Pramas, wincing with pain as he did. A slave girl, whose hair was the color of coal approached him subserviently, carrying a porcelain jug containing water. She had been

trained for most of her life solely to deliver water to combatants. As such, she expertly took out a ladle from her robe, dipped it into the widemouthed jug, and raised it to Renho's lips, pouring just the right amount of water into his mouth. It hurt to swallow, but the water was cold and refreshing.

Before he could finish the entirety of his drink, the ladle was knocked from his mouth. Anger rose quickly, and he instinctively went into a combat stance, pain lancing through his ribs. The slave girl dropped into a prostrated position. The anger subsided almost as fast as it began as he saw Master Tyrum standing there, his face looking as if it were carved from stone, his arms positioned behind his back. Renho both admired and despised Master Tyrum's ability to approach in silence. Master Tyrum referred to this ability as the "Tiger's Gait."

"Explain," was all Master Tyrum said, his jade hued eyes unblinking.

Renho bowed his head, "Master, my strategy was threefold. First, I wished to try out a new technique, employing a reverse spinning elbow strike to an opponent who knew how to fight not just on thralls. Second, I wished to experience fighting with damaged ribs in order to better know how to overcome that specific form of pain. Last, as my House is beneath that of Pramas' House, this would be an excellent opportunity to prove my superiority over Pramas without instigating conflict between our Houses."

"Bold," Master Tyrum said, a smile budding on his face. "Now you will begin training with blades."

"Blades?" Renho said surprised, looking up into his master's face. "But by edict from the Ministry of Obedience, only an apprentice is allowed to train with blades."

"Yes, I suppose that is true." Master Tyrum said, the smile all but gone from his face.

Excitement diminished Renho's pain, being an apprentice to Master Tyrum will bring great honor to his House and will open up opportunities for himself and his family previously barred by tradition. "I won't dishonor you, master."

"See that you don't. I should inform you that I just won 1 pound of gold dust wagering on you with Pramas' uncle. What is more, do you know the price imposed by the Ministry of Obedience for a master killing an apprentice?" Master Tyrum let his question hang in the air.

"It is 1 pound of gold dust, master," Renho responded, remembering who it was he was talking with.

"Commit that to memory. *Apprentice*." Master Tyrum stated, emphasizing the word apprentice.



THE PENTAGRAM

A Spelljamming Ship from Oerth

By Denis "Maldin" Tetreault (of Melkot.com) and Rick "Borb" Esch

As the largest city in the whole of the Flanaess, the City of Greyhawk's docks are always a hive of unceasing activity. The most northern port on the Selintan River, Greyhawk is often the last stop of most ocean-going vessels. Only smaller ships such as the barges of the Rhenee can continue north, through the Cairn Hills, to the Nyr Dvy. Vessels from Keoland, Ironton, Nyond, Verbobonc, and elsewhere, representing the four corners of the continent, all arrive bursting with trade goods and travellers.

New ships are constantly arriving on a daily basis, only to depart several days later on their long routes to distant locations. A limited fleet of smaller ships with shorter trade routes, such as the Greyhawk - Hardby trade corridor, are seen quite often through the year as they depart and return. While many ships hold Greyhawk as their home port by registry, most of the larger ships will not be seen at the docks again for many months as they carry their goods across the high seas. Anyone spending enough time at the docks may notice that one ship seems to appear at the docks with higher frequency than most of its size. A casual observer would assume that this ship has a short route, but anyone able to examine its cargo would see goods from far flung origins. Some largely-disbelieved rumors circulate about the ship having been spotted in ports separated by such great distances, that there would have to be multiple identical ships bearing the same name. After all, one could get away with paying only once to register several ships with the same name, or so the rumors go. But then, such deceptions might be expected by the conspiracy-minded of a ship with its unusual pedigree and arcane name. The ship is called "the Pentagram", and its registered owners are the secretive wizards behind Maldin and Elenderi's Shop of the Arcane. You can learn more about them and their shop by visiting the page at Melkot.com.

The Ship

The Pentagram is classified as a moderate sized carrack, a three-masted sailing ship that is between a caravel and galleon in size and appearance. The ship's figurehead beneath the bowsprit is a couatl, with outspread wings. What is not readily apparent, unless someone has technical

familiarity with the construction of such sailing ships, is that the Pentagram is heavily modified. The Pentagram is a spelljamming vessel.

The Pentagram has been modified in a variety of ways, some more obvious than others. Its rigging has been streamlined for rapid air travel, and for maneuverability in space. The keel and lower hull has been reinforced such that the ship could (carefully) put down on land, though the captain would perform such a maneuver only in an emergency, and only in terrain that could support the ship without it tipping over (such as a slight ravine, marsh or sand).

The ship carries far more formidable armaments than an average ship of its size. The most obvious is the turreted forward medium ballista in the bow. Less obvious from a distance are the two swivel-mounted medium ballistae amidships. Shielded by the sides of the ship, and obscured overhead by the anti-boarding netting, they fire through long slots in the side of the deck that can be closed with hinged covers. Most difficult to spot is the turntable-mounted medium catapult in the stern. It has a permanent illusion cast on it to resemble a rear cabin, and is unlikely to be noticed unless someone on deck walks right up to it and tries to enter the "cabin".



The main deck floor plan is designed for transporting both special goods and people. Many of the rooms can be quickly altered to hold either small groups of individuals (such as adventuring parties in the employ of the ship owners), larger groups of troops or travellers (the largest room can hold 30 hammocks), or storage of trade goods too delicate for the cargo hold. There is a well-stocked workshop that can be used for anything from ship repairs to alchemical experiments.

Captain Jazon Galrese

7th lvl Fighter Human Male, Neutral Good
 Str 18/30 (+1, +3) Int 14 Wis 9 Dex 17 (+2, -3) Con 15 Cha 13
 HP: 52 AC: -2 Languages: Common
 Combat: 2-handed attacks with long sword and dagger (to hit: +3, +1; damage +5, +5)
 Special Items: +2 *Platemail* (usually only worn when expecting trouble), +2 long sword, short sword, +2 dagger, light crossbow

Background:

Jazon Galrese was born in Hardby, where the Selintan River meets the sea, a center of trade and a hub of shipping activity. Galrese became a sailor on a merchant vessel as a youth, and has spent his entire adult life on one type of ship or another. His extensive experience

eventually allowed him to become 1st Mate on a vessel. When Maldin and Elenderi commissioned and launched the Pentagram, they

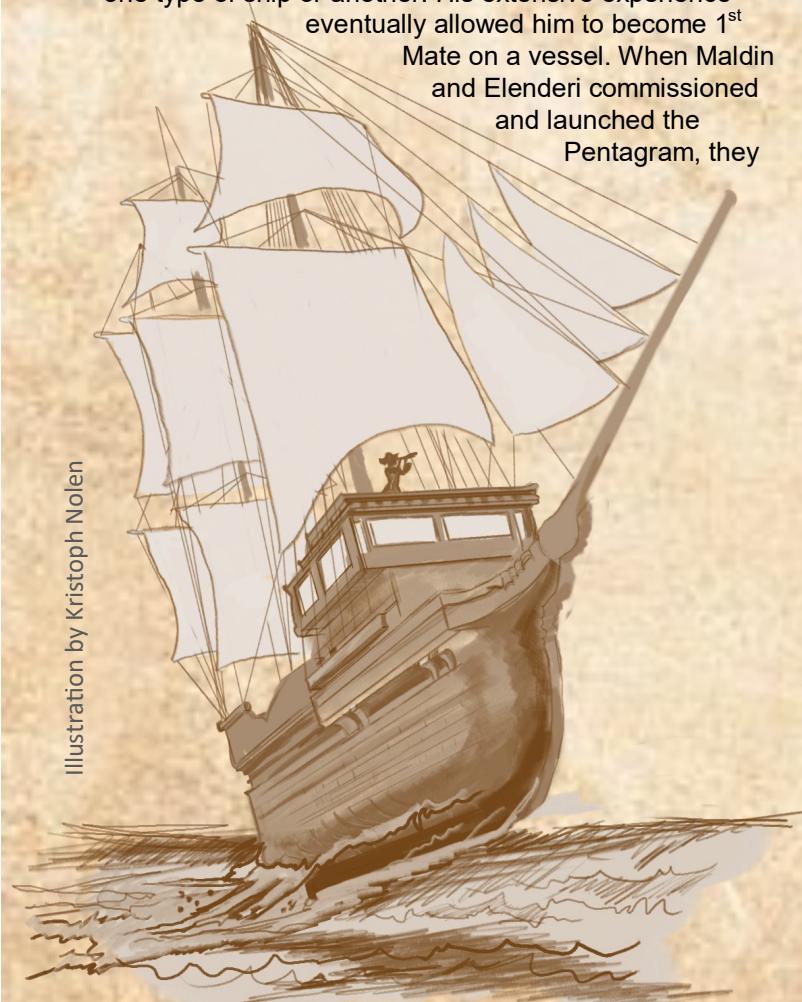


Illustration by Kristoph Nolen

canvassed the various captains that frequented the City of Greyhawk dock quarter, and Jazon's name came up time and again as a shining star of a mariner. They quickly hired him on as the captain of their fleet flagship.

One moonlit evening, sailing off the rugged coast of the Bright Desert on a voyage transporting a group of Maldin's employees, the crew witnessed a shooting star impacting the desert. A landing party was dispatched. They returned the next morning, making quite the entrance. The morning light reflecting off of torn sails was spotted approaching from deep in the desert. An ancient, battered galleon suspended some 100 feet above the ground, drifted into view above the dunes, making a hard landing on the beach and cracking the clearly already weakened hull. The galleon had been crawling with undead, but the team discovered a strange ornate chair bolted to its deck - a spelljamming furnace helm. Since that fateful day, the Pentagram has made numerous trips into wildspace, eventually upgrading its mode of power to a major helm. Their landings are far more graceful now.

Mariad Malinor, Helmsman

8th lvl Priest of Boccob Human Male, Neutral
 Str 17 (+1, +1) Int 15 Wis 17 Dex 15 (0, -1) Con 16 Cha 18 Per 12
 HP: 42 AC: 0 Languages: Common
 Special Items: AC 3 *Bracers*, *Staff of Striking*, +2 *footman's mace*, +2 *ring of protection*, +1 *orbis ring*

Spells: 5 - 1st level spells, 5 - 2nd level spells, 4 - 3rd level spells, 2 - 4th level spells

Background:

The epitome of hard work, perseverance, and faith, Mariad Malinor was born in Shacktown, the poorest quarter of the city of Greyhawk, and spent his early years as a child beggar. One faithful day, a priest passing through the slum happened to see the young, dirty child in the street. He paused for a moment and motioned for the child to approach. The priest held out a single full gold piece coin. He then said "Look to the stars child", turned, and continued on his journey. The cryptic message and the generous gift stuck with Mariad. Sometime later, Mariad learned that the symbol around the priest's neck was the sign of Boccob. Sensing that destiny had tapped him on the shoulder, he decided to enter the Church of Boccob, become an acolyte, and has never looked back.

Mariad was on the Pentagram that day when the ghost ship fell from the sky, and was a member of the team that went ashore. After clearing the ship of undead, they entered the cabin with an ornate chair bolted to the floor. He knew he had to sit on that chair. As he sat on the great throne, his senses seemed to attune with the craft as if the ship were a part of him. It was at that moment the little child returned to hear the priest's voice clear as if he were

beside him... "Look to the stars child".... as the galleon lurched and rose from the ground.

With Mariad on the helm, the Pentagram has an SR of 5. That means the ship has a maximum movement factor of MV 120 (85 miles per hour), and can travel just over 1000 miles in 12 hours (normally the maximum length of time Mariad will fly without having to rest). At that speed, the sails and rigging would quickly rip apart. So, for any long distance travel, Captain Galrese will take the Pentagram above the Oerth's atmosphere (taking 4 turns), cover the distance required, then drop back down into the atmosphere. For short hops, they will choose to fly considerably slower. Routes will be chosen to minimize the chances of being seen (avoiding flying directly over population centers, using topography such as mountains, or flying above the clouds whenever able).

Using the Pentagram in a Campaign

Travel can be a source of great adventure, however, sometimes the PCs may just need to get somewhere fast. Long distance travel in a medieval world can take a very long time and disrupt what may be a time-sensitive mission. Travel by ship from the City of Greyhawk to Irongate is fairly direct, yet takes 8 to 10 days to cover the 800 miles or so. Travel from Greyhawk to Loftwick is more complicated, involving a long, circuitous journey by ocean-going vessel, a trip up river, then the remaining distance by horseback or wagon, and will take on average 32 to 37 days to cover the 1725 mile route.

The Pentagram can serve as a means of quick long-distance travel when speed is important, and neither the players nor the DM wish to deal with all of the likely random encounters. As the ship flies, Irongate is still approximately 800 miles, however Loftwick is 975 miles. The Pentagram can cover those distances in a half a day. If the PCs need to be somewhere fast, inquiries at places like the Broken Staff or Eridok's shop

will point the PCs to the captain of the Pentagram. When they meet with Captain Galrese, he will assure them that he can deliver the PCs anywhere with greater haste than any other ship at the docks ("made the Kessel Run in less than twelve parsecs"), but will be frustratingly vague as to how incredibly fast their journey will actually be. The PCs may not even be aware of spelljamming until the ship sails down river and, once out of sight of the city, lifts off the water and rises up into the sky.

The Pentagram should only be available for charter if and when the DM decides that it is available. They have important duties to take care of first, so departure may not be available right away, and it might not be able to go all the way to where the PCs would like to go. After all, the Pentagram is owned by a pair of very busy archmages. In other words, the DM may want the PCs to go somewhere else first. Fees should be very high, although the DM can approve of some other exchange in lieu of gold, such as magic items or special cargo. Payment in full must be up front, as adventurers often do not return.

Plot Hooks

There are a variety of ways that a DM could utilize the Pentagram as something more than a means of transportation.

The tired old cliché of serving as escort duty can always be utilized, however the owners of the Pentagram generally are capable of providing any needed protection for the ship. The ship's owners have no lack of enemies though.

The PC's could learn of plans to attack or attempt to burglarize the ship by some group (clueless thieves who don't

Lieutenant Dalsen, 1st Mate

4th lvl Fighter Human Male, Neutral Good
Str 17 Int 16 Wis 10 Dex 11 Con 13 Cha 12
HP: 28 AC: 4 Languages: Common
Special Items: *+1 long sword (specialized), +1 ring, chainmail*

Lieutenant Raldon, 2nd Mate

4th lvl Fighter Human Male, Lawful Neutral
Str 13 Int 10 Wis 10 Dex 12 Con 13 Cha 7
HP: 29 AC: 7 Languages: Common
Special Items: *+1 long sword, +1 leather armor*

Petty Officers

"Skipper", Sailing Master (navigator)
4th lvl Fighter Human Male, Lawful Neutral
Str 11 Int 17 Wis 13 Dex 13 Con 10 Cha 11
HP: 23 AC: 5 Languages: Common
Special Items: *+1 short sword, chainmail*

Devon, Quartermaster (supply chief)

3rd lvl Thief Human Male, Neutral
Str 16 Int 13 Wis 9 Dex 16 Con 10 Cha 9
HP: 15 AC: 3 Languages: Common
Special Items: *+1 short sword, chainmail*

Ellson, Bosun (deck supervisor)

3rd lvl Fighter Human Male, Neutral Good
Str 14 Int 12 Wis 12 Dex 10 Con 16 Cha 12
HP: 19 AC: 3 Languages: Common
Special Items: *+1 long sword, chainmail*

Patrel, Master at Arms (security chief)

3rd lvl Fighter Human Male, Lawful Neutral
Str 15 Int 13 Wis 14 Dex 17 Con 16 Cha 14
HP: 20 AC: 3 Languages: Common
Special Items: *+1 longsword (specialized), +2 leather armor*

Remaining crew: 6 2nd lvl Fighters, 14 1st lvl Fighters, 50% long sword, 50% short sword, morale and sailing skill equal to elite veterans.

know the trouble they are about to get into, for low level PCs; a powerful group with an agenda for high level play), or they may observe such an evening raid in progress while visiting the docks late at night.

Spelljammer Ship Stats

Name: The Pentagram

Type: Carrack

Tonnage: 35 tons

Hull Points: 35

Crew: 15 Min/35 Max

Maneuverability Class: standard E, however *sails of maneuverability raise it to Class D*

Landing; Land: No

Landing; Water: Yes

AR: 7

Saves As: thick wood

Power Type: Major helm, with minor helm back up

Ship's Rating: SR 5 with Mariad at the helm (and +1 orbus ring)

Armament: One turreted medium ballista (bow), 2 medium ballista (mid-ship, on swivel, fire through long ports visible along the sides), 1 turreted medium catapult (stern, camouflaged by permanent illusion)

Cargo: 18 tons

Keel Length: 110 feet

Beam Length: 30 feet

Captain Galrese may need to hire an away party to retrieve something once they travel to a location.

A third party (perhaps someone that has already had experience with the PCs in a previous adventure) may have commissioned the Pentagram to deliver something, and wishes to hire an independent group to protect their interests.

The PC's could have been stranded somewhere remote (even hundreds of miles away from a major body of water),

and are shocked to bump into a large ocean-going vessel, either by accident (the Pentagram happens to be in the area for another purpose, which the PC's may or may not get sucked into), or because a patron of the group hired the Pentagram to retrieve them.

The PC's may be hard on their luck and try to stow away on the vessel, unaware of what the ship can do. The obvious location to hide out is the cargo hold. Rather than evenly distributed over the floor of the hold, the cargo will be oddly strapped down in stacks from floor to ceiling where possible, with no space between the cargo and the ceiling of the hold. Anything that isn't stacked as described is tightly secured to the floor with heavy netting. The stowaways will be in for a surprise when, once the ship leaves the planet's surface (of which they may be completely unaware while hiding in the dark, windowless hold), gravity in the hold suddenly reverses and they "drop" to the ceiling. DMs can use this as a way to introduce spelljamming to their campaign.

The Pentagram makes periodic trips into wildspace to exchange personnel, and carry supplies and trade goods to Maldin and Elenderi's branch office in a busy asteroid town in the Grinder, an extensive asteroid field in Greyspace beyond the orbits of Oerth's moons and Greyspace's sun Liga. If DM's choose to place the Rock of Bral in Greyspace, Bral is the destination for the Pentagram. The Rock is an important trade center for the sphere, and is the port of call that serves as the gateway between Oerth and the rest of Greyspace. The PCs can then use the asteroid town (either Bral or another similar settlement) as a jumping off place to continue their adventures in wildspace, or they can return to Oerth with the Pentagram. The Grinder itself is filled with monsters, pirates and other dangers.

The Pentagram is your passage to high adventure. All aboard! Be sure to hang on tight.



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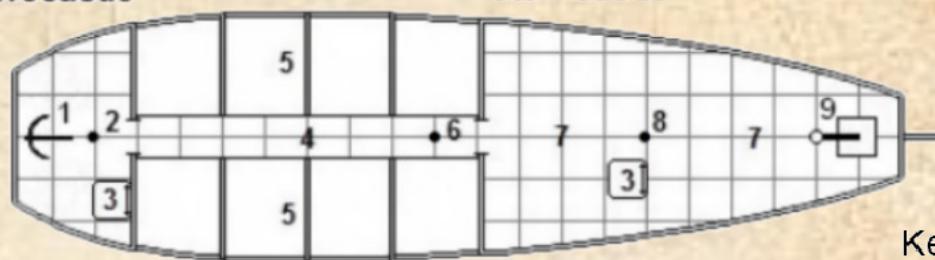
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The Pentagram

Carrack (Great Ship)
1 square = 5 feet

Forecastle

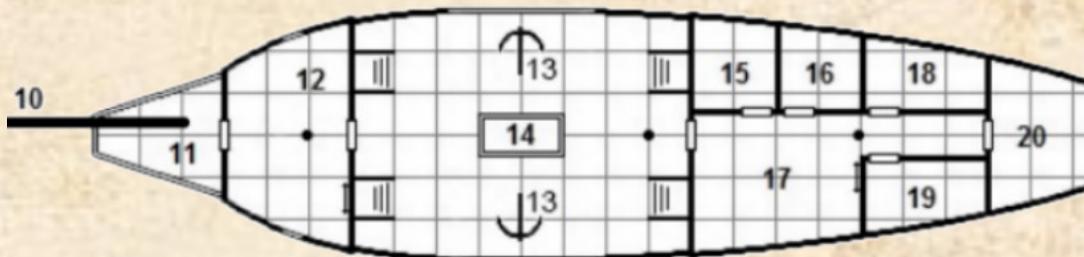


deckplans modified
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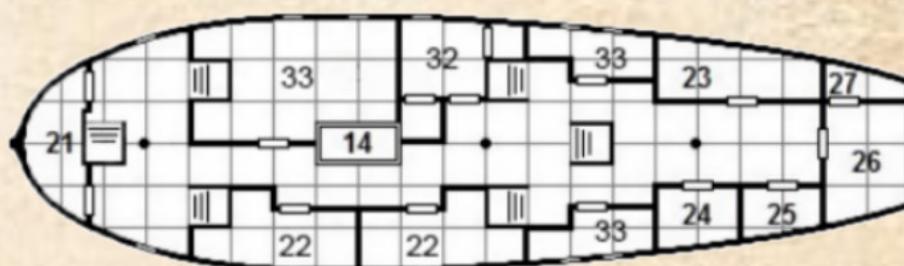
Key

- 1 Forward Ballista
- 2 Foremast
- 3 Hatch to Upper Deck
- 4 Gangway
- 5 Support Beam (for Anti-Boarding Nets)
- 6 Main Mast
- 7 Quarter Deck
- 8 Mizzenmast
- 9 Rear Catapult
- 10 Bowsprit
- 11 Beak / Head
- 12 Crew Quarters
- 13 Side Ballista
- 14 Cargo Hatch
- 15 Officers Quarters
- 16 Officers Quarters
- 17 Officers Mess
- 18 Captain's Quarters
- 19 Helmsman's Quarters
- 20 Helm
- 21 Sail / Rope Locker
- 22 Guest Quarters
- 23 Ammunition Storage
- 24 Armoury
- 25 Storage
- 26 Galley
- 27 Pantry
- 28 Cargo Hold
- 29 Infirmary
- 30 Carpenter Stores
- 31 Brig
- 32 Workshop
- 33 Varies

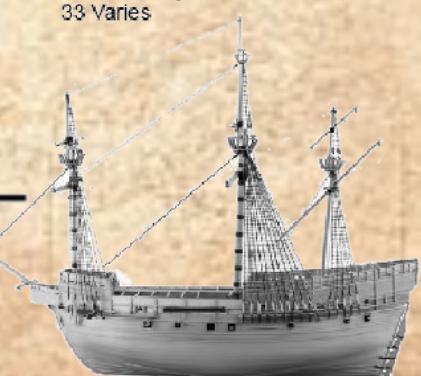
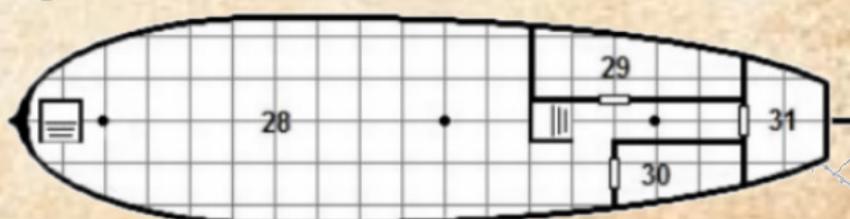
Upper Deck



Main Deck



Cargo Deck



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